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On the Role of *Nehiyaw'skwewak* in Decision Making Among Northern Cree

by

Jeannette Reva Sinclair ©

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1999

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The following certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance a thesis entitled *On the Role of Nehiyaw Akewak in Decision-Making Among Northern Cree* by Jeannette Reva Sinclair in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Michael I. Asch, Ph.D., Supervisor

Andie Diane Palmer, Ph.D.

L. Stanley Wilson, Ph.D.

Date 31 March 1995

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Sam and Edna Sinclair and my family for their support, to my son, Damon who is in pursuit of greater knowledge in the academic halls of learning and among our learned ones, the Elders; to the indigenous Cree people *Sakaw-iyiniwak* of northern Alberta for their willingness to share their knowledge; to those in this study who have since passed on, Julia Fenton, George Gairdner, Margaret McDonald, and Ben Norberg; and to our ancestors, especially the grandmothers whose footprints are on the shores of the Lesser Slave Lake area.

Abstract

Interviews conducted between 1993 and 1998 with community members in the Lesser Slave Lake area of Northern Alberta, a bush Cree (*Nehiyaw sakâwiyiniwak*) community, form the basis for an exploration of the traditional role of Métis women in collective decision making in that community. Oral history methodology, interview style, and analytic conventions inform the study. Men's and women's traditional roles appear to have assumed a differential focus in various decision-making spheres, but were based on an unquestioned assumption of gender equality. Men and women appear to have used somewhat different processes in contributing to making collective decisions. Traditional roles have been confused with the imposition of an outside social and legal system. An appendix includes transcribed interviews with 14 elders.

Acknowledgements

There are several individuals I want to thank beginning with my thesis advisory committee: Dr. Michael Asch, my supervisor, for having faith and patience with me over the years, for helping me to learn about trust and courage, for his passionate convictions to stand by his truth, for the inspirational stories he shared, and for the advice and guidance he gave when I needed it most. I am grateful to Dr. Andie Palmer, for conscientiously reading numerous drafts of the thesis and providing me with insightful feedback, for encouraging me to express what was in my head and in my heart, for her compassion and understanding, and for her deep commitment not only to her students, but to others who ask for her assistance especially when time is so valuable. Thanks to Dr. Stan Wilson for agreeing to be on the committee on such short notice. I appreciated his calm and quiet ways, easy going nature, and thoughtful questions. I am thankful to the chair of the examining committee, Dr. Carl Urion, for his enthusiastic interest in the stories of our people, for his incredible generosity of support in bringing the thesis through the final stages of completion, and for being an excellent role model over the years for Aboriginal students on campus at the University of Alberta.

I want to thank all the *Sakâwiyiniwak*, northern Cree people in Lesser Slave Lake, who generously shared their knowledge for the study in 1993 (listed in alphabetical order):

Mary Jane Bellerose	Anne Gullion
Amanda Boisvert	June Houle
Melanie Bottle	Charlie Jackson
Peter Campion	Pauline Johnson
Alice Cardinal	Sandra Lavallee
Mabel Courtoreille	Madge McCree
Julia Fenton	Margaret McDonald
Catherine Gairdner	Evelyn Norberg
George Gairdner	Elsie Savard
Mary Giroux	Eleanor Sawan
Ned Gladue	Sam Sinclair

I appreciate their participation, their patience and their trust in me to bring this project to completion. I hope that I have not offended anyone in this study; that was not my intention. I also take responsibility for any errors that may occur in the document.

For the oral history project, I want to thank my father, Sam Sinclair, and my son, Damon Kapatch, for all the work that they put into it. I could not have done it without them. A special thank you to Dale Auger for providing the art work of "*Kohkom*" and "*Mooshom*" for the cover of the *Lesser Slave Lake Aboriginal Oral History*. It brought life to the text in a good way and was very much appreciated. I am especially grateful to all the Elders, some of whom are listed above, who were so willing to share their oral history (listed alphabetically):

Francois Auger
John Auger
Alphonse Beaver
Mary Louise Bellam
John Bellerose
Melanie Bottle
Rose Cardinal
Ned Gladue
Delphine Houle
John Houle
Bob Kreutzer
Ben Norberg
Edna Sinclair
Sam Sinclair

Thanks to the University of Alberta Department of Anthropology staff who provided assistance and support over the years, especially Darlene Bagstad, Marlys Rudiak and Gail Mathew. Thank you to the Anthropology graduate students, especially Michael's students for being there for each other. In particular, I want to acknowledge Denise Parsons for all that she has given me and to so many others in such a genuine and kind way. All the support I received has meant a lot to me especially during the difficult times.

Thanks to Mr. Doug Babcock for giving me permission to use his unpublished historical manuscript of the Lesser Slave Lake area. I appreciate all the research and hard work that went into that document. It is an important contribution of historical research of the indigenous people of northern Alberta. I am thankful for having access to it.

I want to acknowledge the following sponsors: Alberta Historical Resources Foundation and its sponsor, Alberta Lotteries, and Aboriginal Affairs for funding the oral history project; and to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) for funding the 1993 study on the role of Métis women in collective decision making.

I want to thank my family, especially my parents, Edna and Sam Sinclair, for their generosity and support in so many ways, and for keeping our family together. Thanks to my brother, Gordon and his wife, Valerie for taking such an interest in our ancestral ways, and for helping with the RCAP and oral history studies; to my sister Linda for her unending emotional and moral support, and to her husband, Fred for generously loaning his camera for the oral history project; to my sister Lorraine for assisting with the RCAP study in the early stages and for her spiritual support over the years; to my brother Rodney and Janet for helping to strengthen the family unit; and to my brother Rocky and my dear friend Jane Martin, my deep appreciation for always being there for me.

I also want to acknowledge Jill Decuyper, Sheila Hallet Kushniruk, Ann Christine Lazic and Noreen Bell for their friendship and support over the years.

Finally, I am thankful to the younger generations in the family; to my nieces and nephews (and their children) for lighting up our lives and bringing such joy to the family; and last but not least, I give thanks to my wonderful son Damon, for his patience during my years of being a "struggling student", knowing that he believed in me in a way that I truly treasure. I am grateful to all of you. I could not have accomplished this without your help.

We Are Not Alone

a light in the distance
glimmering in the dark
guiding like the northern star,
kîwetinohk acahkos
promising us warmth
encouraging us
we are not alone
we see all our relations,
kiwahkomâkaninawak
along the way

the trees, *sihtak, mîtosak,*
waskwayak, oskâhtakwak
beckoning to us with outstretched arms
offering protection, shelter,
a place to rest on our journey
to gather strength
showing us how to stand tall
with honesty and dignity

yôtin, the wind,
the breath of Mother Earth,
okâwîmâw askîy, quietly whispering
to step lightly on the grasses
on those who teach kindness
walk softly on the medicines
of our sacred Mother

our protector, brother wolf,
nistes mahihkan,
howling at our grandmother
for us to be brave
to keep moving like the flowing river,
kâ pim'ciwak sîpîy,
there for us in times of need
for our survival
providing water, *nipîy*
restoring our energy
its healing powers
cleansing and purifying

muskwa, the bear,
showing us strength and leadership
nudging us to go on, to have courage
and look within, introspection,
sacred eagle, *kihew,* the visionary
seeing far into the distance flying high above
knowing what lies ahead

ôhô,
the owl,
our sister
who shares
wisdom and
vision in the
night

nimosôm asinîy,
our grandfather rock,
reminding us to have faith
to be strong, not to quit
beyond the shadows
is the light

grandmother moon,
nohkom tipiskâw pîsîm,
gently reassuring that she will
guide us in her fullness to help
find our way in the night
no matter how dark

in the distance
the flicker of light
at times hard to see
gets blurred by fear
dulled with confusion
clouded by uncertainty
weakened with worry

welcome this light,
wihkohta ôma wâsiyâw!
the eternal light
the sacred fire within
fear not this journey
the path to our hearts
we are guided by
all our relations
our ancestors
who walked before
we are never alone

I am deeply grateful, *ninanâskomon*
for all that we are, all that we have, for life!

Jeannette Sinclair
March 31, 1999

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project is primarily to examine the traditional role of Métis women in collective decision making in a northern Alberta community; and secondarily to provide an opportunity for voices of the northern Cree to be heard. In 1993 a study sponsored by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), was undertaken to examine the role of the Métis Cree women in the Lesser Slave Lake area of northern Alberta. Twenty-two individuals, referred to in this study as "informants," were interviewed. The findings from the interviews are incorporated in this report mainly in the interpretation and analysis section (Chapter V). Decision making among Métis women is examined through exploration of social, cultural, religious, economic, and political influences. This paper describes the research methodology, historical background, community profile, and interpretation and analysis. A selection of excerpts from the informants' testimonies is included as Appendix A.

In addition, an oral history of the *Nehiyaw sakâwiyiniwak*— northern Cree people ("bush" Cree)—was undertaken in 1996. The oral history project was born out of the RCAP study because of the lack of literature about the Cree people from the Lesser Slave Lake area. Fourteen elders from northern Alberta were interviewed between 1996 and 1998. Transcriptions from those interviews were compiled into a document entitled *Lesser Slave Lake Aboriginal Oral History* (J. Sinclair, 1998), included as Appendix B.

Since the primary focus of this study is about indigenous Cree women, the term for Cree women, *Nehiyaw'skewak*, is used in the title. Less attention is paid to their Aboriginal status; instead the commonality of their Cree heritage is highlighted. There are many variations in the spelling of Cree words, given the traditional oral transmission of indigenous languages. For this study, Standard Roman Orthography, followed by most Western Canadian universities, is used in the *Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary* (LeClaire & Cardinal, 1998). Dr. David Pentland is credited for standardizing Roman Orthography for the Cree language (Hunter, Karpinski, & Mulder, 1994, p. ii).

It is equally important to address the terminology used in this study as it relates to Aboriginal people. The research was done over a period of five years between 1993 and 1998, which contributed to slight changes in terminology. The term "Aboriginal" refers collectively to Indians, Inuit, and Métis people of Canada. The words "aboriginal peoples of Canada" first appeared as a "term in Canadian law with the passage of the Constitution Act, 1982" (Woodward, 1989, p. 3). "Aboriginal" became a generally accepted term in the political realm, in government publications, in contemporary literature, and in the media. However, in some communities, such as Lesser Slave Lake, "Native" was more commonly used at the time of the RCAP research. "Aboriginal" and "Native" are used interchangeably in this study with reference to local indigenous peoples.

The term "Métis" used in the RCAP study reflects a broad category of Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Métis people are recognized in s.35(2) of the Constitution Act of Canada, 1982, along with Inuit and Indian peoples. However, the Act provides no definition of who they are. There are several interpretations of the term "Métis." In *Native Law*, Jack Woodward (1989) discussed some varying definitions:

> The Alberta Métis Betterment Act defines a Métis as a person of mixed white and Indian blood, and having not less than one quarter Indian blood (not including an Indian or non-treaty Indian as defined in the Indian Act).
>
> . . .
>
> The Métis National Council asserts that a Métis is any person of aboriginal ancestry who declares that he or she is a Métis. However, Douglas Sanders has said that if there is a legal definition of the word Métis, it must mean the people who took "half-breed" grants under the Manitoba Act, 1870 or the Dominion Lands Act, or the descendants of those people.
>
> There may well be two or more categories of Métis for legal purposes, each with a different legal position. (pp. 54-55)

Some of the Métis in the Slave Lake area could also be considered non-Status Indians, although it is not a commonly used term in the Lesser Slave Lake area. Woodward (1989) stated that there is no clear distinction in Canadian law between Métis people and those of mixed Indian and non-Indian descent:

> "Non-status" Indians are persons with some degree of Indian blood and culture, but who fall outside the statutory definition of an Indian in the Indian Act.
>
> There are no judicial decisions on point, but most commentators say that "non-status Indians" are also "Indians" within the meaning of s.91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867. Some non-status Indians are full-blooded Indians racially, but they do not fall under the Indian Act for some reason. These reasons include enfranchisement, or the marriage of an Indian woman to a non-Indian man. . . . In other cases a person's Indian ancestors may have been left off the lists forming the charter group for Indian membership, or they may have been classified erroneously as "half-breeds" (p. 58)

Since many Métis people in the Lesser Slave Lake area gained Indian status as a result of the Amendment to the Indian Act in 1985, commonly known as Bill C31, the term Métis in this study includes non-status Indians.

Aboriginal people in the Lesser Slave Lake area are predominantly Cree; therefore, the terms *Âpihtaw'kosisân* and/or "Half-breed" were used by the local indigenous people with reference to a person of mixed ancestry. Today the term Métis is more commonly used.

Métis elder Alvena Strasbourg (n.d.) from northeastern Alberta described her Métis ancestry in a recent publication, Memories of a Metis Woman:

> Some of my ancestors were the French, Scottish and English people who landed in Canada hundreds of years ago. And some of my ancestors were the North American Indians who welcomed these travellers and traded with them. The Europeans took Indian women as their 'country' wives. These knowledgeable women taught their men how to survive in this land. Their

> children formed a new nation—the Metis—the best of all these cultures. My mother was French, Scottish and Cree; my father, French and Cree. (p. 5)

Strasbourg (n.d.) went on to describe how her grandparents did not sign treaty since they did not want the confinement of reserve life at that time. Instead, they took land scrip, and as a result their families became Métis:

> When the Government started signing Treaties with the Indians and putting them on reserves, my Grandparents on both sides refused to sign. I remember Grandpa Julian Cardinal telling us this when we were very young. He chose the homestead land the government offered, signing the 'Scrip,' which repealed all his treaty rights. He said, "Nobody fences me in. The Government won't control my life. I'll run my own." . . . Grandpa Napoleon Laboucane, did the same thing. . . . Since my grandparents refused to live on a reserve, we are not treaty, we are Metis. (p. 6)

Many people of mixed Aboriginal ancestry refer to themselves as Métis; others self-identify as "Half-breeds." In Janice Acoose's (1993) article entitled "Halfbreed: A Revisiting of Maria Campbell's Text from an Indigenous Perspective" in *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature,* she discussed the current use of the term "Half-breed" in self-identification:

> Campbell's reference to herself as a Halfbreed disturbs many liberal White-Euro-Canadians who think of the term as derogatory and are thus puzzled by her continued use of it. . . . Maria Campbell, and many other contemporary people, still use the term Halfbreed; some refer to themselves as Halfbreeds with a strong nationalistic pride, while others use the term as a kind of blatant reminder of Canadian society's racism towards them. (pp. 140-141)

Acoose (1993) wrote about differing perceptions of the terms Métis and "Half-breed," as explained by Métis activist Howard Adams (1989):

> To the whites of Canada, "Metis" means a light coloured Indian. In Canadian history, "halfbreed" refers specifically to the group of people who are part Indian and part white. These halfbreed people did not have a choice as to whether they would be Indians or white or in-between; society defined them as members of the native society and it still does today. Halfbreed was the original name used by white traders in the early fur-trading years, but today this word has become unacceptable to mainstream society. To whites, halfbreed became a vulgar expression, so they adopted the name Métis—the French expression for mixed blood—which seems to be a more polite term. Most hinterland natives, however, still use the term halfbreed or simply "breed", while urban natives use Métis. (pp. 140-141)

Still others, such as the Métis women's group Women of the Métis Nation, use the Cree term *Otipemsiwak*, which translates as "people who own themselves" (Green, 1993, p. 1). The term is spelled differently and has different interpretations. Women of the Métis Nation changed the term as follows: "We transmuted (in fine Métis fashion) *Otipemsiwak* to "women who own themselves" (p. 1). Donna Paskemin (April 7, 1999), Cree Instructor at the School of Native Studies at the University of Alberta, translated *otipeyimisowak* as "they own themselves." She also stated that "traditional [Cree] *Nehiyaw* upbringing advises against people using this term for themselves. The teaching is that the Creator created you, not yourself." She went on to say, "I have often heard instead *namoya kitipeyimsow*, 'you don't own yourself'" (April 7, 1999). In the *Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary* (LeClaire & Cardinal, 1998), the definition for *otipeyimisiwak* (plural) is "a spoiled brat" (p. 134). However, a similar term, *tipeyimisiw* is defined as "the act of being one's own boss" (p. 377).

Cree people of northern Alberta identify themselves generally as *Nehiyawak* or, more specifically, as "bush" (*Sakâw*) Cree (Auger, 1997, p. 327; Dion, as cited in Ward, 1995, pp. 57-58). Another term used by northern Cree speakers to differentiate themselves from the Plains Cree is *Nehiyaw sakâwiyiniwak*—Cree "bush" people (G. Cardinal, March 25, 1999). Historical literature written about the Cree in northern Alberta referred to Woodland Cree (Dempsey, 1988, pp. 57-63; Sawyer, 1981, pp. 7-8; Ward, pp. 71-77); and less frequently, to Woods Cree (Giraud, 1945/1986, pp. 38-43) or Western Wood Cree (Smith, 1981, p. 256).

This study is not intended to be considered exhaustive or comprehensive, but instead provides the reader with some insight based on indigenous knowledge. I have not updated local census data used at the time that the field research was conducted in 1993 in order that the data remain consistent with the information garnered from the interviews.

Since 1993 more literature has been written by and about Aboriginal women in Canada. This literature is not discussed in this document; however, it is recommended that Aboriginal women's literature be read since, historically, their voices have not been adequately heard. The focus of this work is on local historical literature and on the words of the indigenous Cree people in the Lesser Slave Lake area and in other parts of northern Alberta.

Conducting this study has been a very valuable experience personally. It has given me a greater understanding of the role of Aboriginal Cree women; I had to look deeper to detect their "power" since they often work "behind the scenes" in less visible roles.

It was difficult to gain a clear picture of their roles given the diversity of ages of the individuals interviewed. However, what was consistent throughout the study was the knowledge of the strong sense of presence and character of the local indigenous women that has existed and continues to exist today. Their influence and leadership are revealed not only in their families, but in the greater community as well.

It should also be noted that it is only recent literature that has included Cree terms such as *Sakâw* ("bush") Cree to describe northern Cree in Alberta. For the purpose of this study, "Métis" is used as an all encompassing term and is meant to include *Âpihtaw 'kosisânak* (plural), "Half-breeds," non-status Indians, *Otipemsiwak*, and indigenous people of mixed Indian and non-Indian descent.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

The research design phase of the project was completed in January and February 1993. Consent forms were developed and submitted to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) for their approval prior to commencement of the fieldwork. This was to ensure that the participants provided their informed consent. Forms were used to obtain consent from the community and individual participants. Based on RCAP requirements, I developed forms for interviews conducted in Cree and for the witnesses of those interviews, to demonstrate that the Cree interviewee was providing his or her informed consent. In addition, forms were used to indicate the honoraria given to participants for their time (see Appendix C for sample forms).

Letters of support from local Native organizations were obtained in the spring of 1993 and submitted to RCAP as required. The first drafts of the community profile (Chapter III) and the historical component (Chapter IV) were submitted to RCAP following the development of the research design. RCAP (1993) produced Ethical Guidelines for Research to be used by the researchers. Prior to developing the main research instrument for conducting fieldwork, the criteria for selecting participants had to be established.

One principle of the Ethical Guidelines for Research for RCAP (1993) is as follows: "In research portraying community life, the multiplicity of viewpoints present within Aboriginal communities should be represented fairly, including viewpoints specific to age and gender groups" (p. 2). With that in mind, the criteria for selecting informants were developed and submitted to RCAP for approval. The list of criteria was used as a guideline to obtain a representative sample of the local Aboriginal population. The following considerations were included: gender, age, Aboriginal status, marital status, education, employment, residency, and community participation (see Appendix D).

A list of potential individuals to be interviewed was compiled in consultation with long-term residents of the Native community and local Native organizations. A "snowball" technique was used in developing the list. Initially, input was obtained from relatives residing in the community, representatives of local Native organizations, and unofficial leaders in the area, many of whom agreed to be interviewed. As the informants were interviewed, they were asked if they knew of others who would be interested in participating. Some individuals on the list chose not to be interviewed; others were willing, but conflicting schedules and time constraints prevented them from doing so.

The intent of this project was to focus on the qualitative rather than the quantitative aspect of the research. The actual fieldwork of interviewing 22 individuals was conducted over a six-week period from June 4th to July 15th, 1993. Transcribing tapes, editing and analyzing interviews, and report writing were undertaken in July and August. In the months that followed, the transcriptions were sent to the informants for feedback, and revisions were made accordingly.

The transcriptions of the interviews amount to 240 single-spaced pages. It would have been too cumbersome to include the full-length interviews in this document. Therefore, I selected 40 questions which I felt were most relevant to the research topic. A compilation of excerpts of the informants' responses to those questions make up the informants' testimonies, in Appendix A.

The focus of the interpretation and analysis in Chapter V is based on the excerpts included in Appendix A. It would have been too onerous a task to attempt to analyze all of their responses. I included a broad cross section of perspectives, while simultaneously looking for similar patterns of thought, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. RCAP's (1993) Ethical Guidelines for collaborative research in community-based studies indicate that "researchers shall ensure that a representative cross-section of community experiences and perceptions is included" (p. 5). It was difficult to select the excerpts to include, because each interview on its own is rich in content.

A schedule of questions was prepared as the main research instrument. After four initial interviews were conducted, it became apparent that the interviews required more focus. Changes were made to the questions after consultation with RCAP. Because there was variance in the interviews, manually tabulating comparable responses was a complex task. The length of the transcriptions varied between 10 and 25 pages.

Selecting excerpts from the testimonies had to be done with great care, as the identities of the individuals interviewed are included. Some of the informants' responses were frank, even when discussing sensitive issues. In an effort to avoid offending them or their families, excerpts of a sensitive nature were reviewed with them over the telephone, particularly with those who do not read or write the English language. Although minor in scope, some changes were made to their transcriptions to satisfy their concerns. Each informant was provided a transcription of his or her interview.

It is important to note that this document can provide only a "snapshot" of attitudes of the people involved, because the average time spent with them during the interview was approximately 90 minutes. Conducting ethnographic fieldwork over a number of years would provide a more thorough understanding of a community. Michael H. Agar, in *The Professional Stranger* (1980) described the data-collection and analysis process in doing ethnographies:

> In ethnography, . . . you learn something ("collect some data"), then you try to make sense out of it ("analysis"), then you go back and see if the interpretation makes sense in light of new experience ("collect more data"), then you refine your interpretation ("more analysis"), and so on. The process is dialectic, not linear. (p. 9)

For this research project, restrictions of time and limited financial resources did not allow for such extensive research. In addition to the field research conducted in the summer months of 1993, I drew on my personal knowledge of the community, having been born and raised there. In addition, our family continually spends time in the area whenever we can, since our relatives and ancestral roots are in the Lesser Slave Lake area.

I began conducting the interviews by contacting two of the eldest interview subjects. Because I am not fluent in the Cree language, two local individuals were recruited to provide translation services. My uncle, Clifford Sinclair, provided

simultaneous translation during parts of the interviews; for the remainder, he translated from audio tape. The task of the second translator, Sandra Lavallee, was to translate interviews from tape. I also interviewed her and her grandfather, Mr. Ned Gladue, for the study. Sandra was the youngest person interviewed.

Only one interview was conducted exclusively in Cree with the eldest informant, Mrs. Melanie Bottle. She was 91 years old at the time of the field research in 1993. She is also the eldest Métis resident in Slave Lake. Three interviews were conducted in a combination of Cree and English; 18 were in English only. Nineteen of the participants said that Cree was their first language, and three indicated their first language as English. All but one were fluent in English. Two of the informants are not community residents, although they were employed in the local area at the time and have lived in Slave Lake for many years prior to 1993. One commutes to town every week; the other does contract work in the Lesser Slave Lake region on an intermittent basis.

Although the focus of the RCAP research was about Métis women, 7 of the 22 participants were considered Status Indians under Bill C-31 at the time the research was conducted in 1993. The term that is commonly used for those who have experienced this change in status is "Bill C-31s" or "C-31s." They were interviewed for the RCAP project because they were considered *Âpihtaw'kosisân*, Métis or "Half-breeds," for the majority of their adult years. Seventeen women and five men were interviewed. The numbers of informants and the range of ages break down as follows:

	No.	Age
	1	90s
	3	80s
	5	70s
	5	60s
	5	50s
	1	40s
	1	30s
	1	20s
Total	22	

Nineteen of 22 informants were over the age of 50; four were over 80 years of age. (For a summary of their ages, Aboriginal status, and first language, see Table 1 in Chapter V, under Aboriginal Status, p. 46.)

The length of time needed to conduct the interviews varied from approximately one to four hours. I met with 18 individuals in their homes. All interviews were audio tape recorded. Equipment problems resulted in the loss of part of one interview. In addition to the 22 interviews, I consulted with three local representatives of the Métis organizations to gain a contemporary perspective as opposed to historical information on the Métis community; two were from the Métis Local, and one was from the Métis regional office.

Research Instruments

In developing questions for the interviews, the following categories were established in consultation with RCAP: Personal Data; Aboriginal Status; Language; Education; Employment; Economic Conditions; Hunting, Fishing and Gathering; Health Care; Marriage and Settlement Patterns; Community Context; Gender Roles; Adaptation of Women; Leadership; Decision-Making; Political Processes; and Changing Traditions. Within each of these categories, I identified key points to be included in the questions.

The next step was to design the main research instrument. A schedule of approximately 100 questions was developed from the categories listed above (see Appendix—D for Research Instruments). In *Learning How to Ask,* Charles L. Briggs (1986) provided the distinction between a schedule of questions and a questionnaire: "The actual list of questions that is used in an interview is generally termed a "schedule." It thus contrasts with a "questionnaire," a list of questions the subject reads and completes without the assistance of the researcher (p. 20). The research instrument was intended as an interview guide, not to be given to the participants for completion on their own. The schedule of questions was submitted to RCAP for their input.

In *The Professional Stranger,* Michael H. Agar (1980) discussed his bias in using the informal ethnographic interview as a starting place in beginning fieldwork and using observation in a supplemental role:

> It's called "informal" for a variety of reasons. First, you don't have a written list of questions. Rather, you have a repertoire of question-asking strategies from which you draw as the moment seems appropriate.
>
> It's also informal because you are not taking on the formal role of interrogator. . . . In this early dance, the informant takes the lead. (p. 90)

I used a similar informal approach in conducting the first few interviews. The first interview was with the eldest informant, Mrs. Melanie Bottle. Her daughter, Mabel Sloan; the translator, Clifford Sinclair; and I were also present. We met with her over two consecutive days. The first day I asked the questions, which were translated into Cree by the translator; the informant responded in Cree; then her daughter translated into English. It was a time-consuming process, and we wanted to avoid overtiring her with too many questions at once, considering her age. We therefore went back and finished the interview the next day.

On the second day I did not use a schedule of questions. Instead, I asked if she had stories that she wanted to share with us. She told us stories that she had heard from her mother about what some people in the area did long ago to keep from starving. She talked about her first encounter with a White person in the community when she was a child. She told us about people making boats out of trees and using scows pulled by men along the river banks as modes of transportation before the steamboats arrived. She said that at that time people in the area did not speak English at home. Her husband was the only one in her family who spoke English. Her children learned English later when they went to school (see Appendix B, *Lesser Slave Lake Aboriginal Oral History,* pp. 178-179).

The less structured format used in the first interviews served to evoke such anecdotal narratives about early local history. The stories provided background and context which the more structured interviews could not have captured because I did not include questions in the interview schedule related to those topics. Inviting the participant to share her stories rather than focusing on a schedule of questions seemed to create a more relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere, and there was more laughter during the interview on the second day.

As the interviewer, I enjoyed the more informal process. However, I was concerned about reliability and validity of the data collected, because they are considered benchmarks for the measurement of the data collection and analysis. Therefore, the schedule of questions was changed to a more structured format early in the interview process. The RCAP research coordinator also advised that I needed more structure in the interviews. Briggs (1986) discussed tension that researchers experience in conducting and evaluating interviews:

> The interviewer is thus subjected to conflicting pressures. She or he expects to be able to keep the interaction within the confines of the interview. The very success of that interview depends, however, on the researcher's capacity for allowing native communicative routines to work their way into the interview situation. This ambiguity also provides conflicting bases for evaluating interviews. Does the ability to maintain a focus on the research interests of the interviewer and his or her plan for the interaction constitute success? Or do the best interviews emerge from a more egalitarian cooperation in which both fieldworker and consultant contribute to the interview agenda and to the form of the discourse? The dilemma also raises the familiar issue of reliability versus validity. The interviewer's attempts to increase reliability by standardizing the presentation of the questions thwarts her or his ability to achieve ecological validity. (p. 28)

In spite of the desire to have some standardization in the interview schedule, several factors were considered in changing the questions and format of the interviews. My goal was to design questions to minimize misunderstanding or misinterpretation and to allow for cultural differences and for ease in translation. In spite of my efforts, it became apparent during some interviews that certain questions were not easily understood by the informants. It was difficult to design an appropriate set of questions for such a varied group—from a young woman in her 20s with some postsecondary education to an elderly woman in her 90s who does not speak English and has no formal education. Therefore, adjustments had to be made to the interview schedule.

I made adjustments based on their reactions to the questions. Sometimes they did not respond; other times, I realized some questions were inappropriate to ask; and at times my choice of words was unsuitable. Briggs (1986) referred to such communication problems as "communicative blunders." Changes were made to the questions based on my knowledge of the culture, the individuals, and the community. For example, during one interview the informant let me know that my choice of the word "influential" was inappropriate when I asked if some families were more influential than others. Her

response was, "I don't think that is even an Indian way. That belongs to the White people. To me it's not a word for an Indian woman" (Interview #17). I rephrased the question and substituted the word "stronger" in place of "influential."

As the interview process was under way, I regretted not having adequate time to test the schedule of questions beforehand. Briggs (1986) used a four-phase approach in conducting interviews and interpreting the results. In phase three, he discussed the importance of including reflexivity in the interviewing process to increase the researcher's awareness of conversational norms and procedural problems:

> It will enable the investigator to discern where she or he has misconstrued the meaning of the responses, thus heading off possible errors in the interpretation of the data. Likewise, periodic evaluations will enable the researcher to progressively reduce the scope of the difficulties that procedural problems pose for the success of the research. This awareness can permit researchers to avoid the faux pas that reduce the coherence of the discourse and render their interviewees less willing and able to respond. (p. 101)

Conducting field research such as ethnographic fieldwork over a longer period of time in communities allows more time for reflexivity. For this project, however, I was limited to the summer months of 1993 after completing an undergraduate degree and moving on to graduate studies in the fall of 1993.

Ethical Guidelines

As a researcher, it was my responsibility to observe conscientiously the Ethical Guidelines for Research developed by RCAP (1993). I attempted to conduct my research in an ethical and professional manner with a sincere effort to maintain the integrity of the informants. Local protocol was to be followed with the intent to ensure that "appropriate respect is given to the cultures, languages, knowledge and values of Aboriginal peoples, and to the standards used by Aboriginal peoples to legitimate knowledge" (RCAP, 1993, p. 1). Based on my knowledge of local Aboriginal culture and the community, appropriate protocol was followed.

Slave Lake has a regional office representing Métis people of the north-central area of Alberta. The political structure of the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) is comprised of six regional councils in the province (see MNA map in Appendix E, Figure 1). Within each region are local political entities called "Métis locals." Slave Lake is located in the Zone Five region. The Vice-President of the Zone Five Regional Council of the Métis Nation of Alberta consented to participate as an informant and provided a letter of support. There was one active Métis Local in town at the time the research was conducted. The President of Métis Local #77203 was interviewed about the Métis community in Slave Lake and also wrote a letter of support.

The Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre provided temporary office space and a support letter. These local Native organizations were given copies of RCAP's (1993) Ethical Guidelines for Research. Their letters of support were submitted to RCAP as required, prior to conducting fieldwork.

Informed consent was obtained from all of the informants, as required by RCAP. Separate forms were required for interviews conducted in Cree, stating that the consent forms were translated appropriately. The translator had to sign a separate witness form indicating that the informant understood the terms and conditions of the agreement. All informants were compensated with a small honoraria for their time, as agreed by RCAP. They were told after their interviews that they would receive an honorarium. The signed consent forms indicated that the final report would be discussed with them and that they would be informed about its publication. In addition, they were assured that they could withdraw from the project at any time.

All participants received copies of their transcripts for their review and feedback. I received feedback from two individuals who expressed concerns about their transcripts. Changes were made accordingly, because they did not significantly alter the meaning of their responses. My preference was to go back to the community and meet with each individual to obtain feedback of the transcripts. Time restrictions did not allow for in-person postinterview follow-up in the fall of 1993.

I went to Slave Lake for follow-up meetings with the informants in 1999. Three of the participants have passed away since 1993, and two individuals have moved away from the community. Photographs were taken of the remaining informants who were available. They were provided with a verbal update, with which they agreed. Their photographs and transcriptions will be compiled into a booklet for local distribution; they were informed that they would each receive a copy.

The intent in conducting this research project was to strive for community-based involvement. Ideally, consultation with appropriate Aboriginal bodies should be undertaken in the planning, execution, and evaluation of results. In this case the local Native organizations were contacted for their input in the initial developmental stages.

The collaborative aspect of the project to some extent was at a national level involving Aboriginal researchers and research coordinators associated with RCAP Women's Perspectives. Much of the collaboration was done initially in the development of the research design and the research instruments. Periodic consultation was undertaken by the research coordinator on behalf of RCAP, as the sponsor, and myself as the researcher. Over the course of my contract with RCAP, there were several different individuals who filled the position of research coordinator for Women's Perspectives.

Motivation for Conducting the Research

One of my initial considerations in being involved with the RCAP study was that it could provide an opportunity for the voices of the local Aboriginal community to be heard. To my knowledge there had not been any published articles or books written by and about Aboriginal people in the community except for Native newspapers. Local historical publications have some Aboriginal content, but they do not adequately provide an Aboriginal perspective. It was anticipated that this project could help to contribute to the scarcity of existing local Aboriginal literature.

Another important consideration was the potential benefit to the project participants in addition to the informants. Participatory action research was held as a model for which to strive in the development of research capacity in the community. Local participants could gain experience in undertaking their own research. Individuals from

Slave Lake were involved as informants, advisors, and translators throughout the fieldwork stage.

Because the field research was undertaken in 1993, I have been on a reflexive journey to better understand my personal motivation for undertaking the study. At the first indigenous scholars' conference held at the University of Alberta in March 1995, one of the speakers, Chickasaw scholar Eber Hampton (1995), discussed two important issues that helped me reflect on why I chose to do the research project. His presentation was entitled "Memory Comes Before Knowledge: Research May Improve if Researchers Remember Their Motives." These are his words:

> In thinking about research I am reminded that my friend Lionel told me that memory comes before knowledge. I spent a long time with him listening and talking about how memory comes before knowledge. When I remember my own experience with research—and research is central to graduate education—I remember that research is about learning. Some people say it is about the creation of knowledge; I'm not quite that arrogant. I have to say that for me research is about learning and so is a way of finding out things. To follow what Lionel told me and to start with memory, I am saying that memory comes before knowledge. (p. 48)

In keeping with Hampton's (1995) assertion that memory comes before knowledge, involves reflexive introspection. He told his story about asking himself why he chose to research how humans deal with misinformation:

> Why was I so fascinated by how people deal with misinformation? In the intervening years I had experienced ceremonies with the Elders and sitting alone until an answer came; being willing to hear that answer, even if it is sometimes painful, or ugly. When the answer came it was in the form of a 6-year-old little Indian boy by the name of Eber, sitting at a desk in a classroom looking at a picture of an Indian on a page in a textbook. That is why I have had a lifelong interest in how humans deal with misinformation. (pp. 49-50)

Hampton (1995) asserted that underlying peoples' choices in doing research is motive, and attached to that is emotion:

> One thing I want to say about research is that there is a motive. We feel because we are hungry, cold, afraid, brave, loving, or hateful. We do what we do for reasons, emotional reasons. That is the engine that drives us. That is the gift of the Creator of life. Life feels. We do our research, as abstract and intellectual as it may be; . . . we do what we do for emotional reasons. Feeling is connected to our intellect and we ignore, hide from, disguise, and suppress that feeling at our peril and at the peril of those around us. Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual, academic research is a goddamn lie; it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and a lie to other people. Humans—feeling, living, breathing, thinking humans—do

> research. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first, and then to people around us. (p. 52)

In examining my deeper motivation for doing this research, I had to look beyond the potential benefits to the local Aboriginal people. I had to ask myself many questions, such as, What is it that motivated me to want to examine the traditional roles of Cree women in collective decision making in my home community of Lesser Slave Lake? When I reflect on how decisions were made among Aboriginal people during the period that I remember from the 1960s to the present day, the political organizations clearly have been male dominated. This is not to say that historically—at least, since history was recorded—women were included in the political structures of the northern Cree in Alberta. Based on early records of the designated signatories to the treaties, the spokespersons were men; more specifically, headmen. Similarly, Métis politics in Alberta have been heavily male influenced since its inception in the 1930s by five Cree men, Joseph Dion, Malcolm Norris, Felix Callihoo, Pete Tomkins, and Jim Brady.

This is also not to say that Aboriginal women from northern Alberta are excluded from political involvement in their communities today. Many are actively involved in local governance on Band councils, First Nations confederacies, Métis Settlement councils, Métis locals, and Aboriginal women's organizations. Others participate in provincial political organizations, such as Métis Nation of Alberta President Audrey Poitras; and at a national level, Marilyn Buffalo, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada. Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Pearl Calahasen, Minister Without Portfolio Responsible for Children's Services, is from the Lesser Slave Lake area. Senator Thelma Chalifoux, who is also from northern Alberta, is a federal government representative. In addition, Aboriginal women are involved on a broader scale at international indigenous levels.

Therefore, in asking myself why I was interested in looking at the influences that affected the changing role of Aboriginal women in decision making in their communities and families, like Hampton (1995), I had to go back to my early childhood years. I saw the strength of the women in our family and in our community. My maternal grandmother, Agathe Sinclair (née Courtoreille), was the matriarch in my father's family. She undoubtedly was the backbone of the Sinclair family in Slave Lake. Her influence was strongly felt throughout the extended family. She did not speak English, and my siblings and I did not speak Cree; yet she unequivocally got her messages across to us. For the RCAP study, as previously stated, I interviewed three of her children: my aunts, Mary Jane Bellerose, who was in her 70s, and Evelyn Norberg, who was in her 50s; and my father, Sam Sinclair, who was in his 60s at the time of the research. I wanted to know their perceptions of their mother's role in their family since their ages were quite varied and their life experiences were significantly different.

Similarly, there were many strong females in the community whose roles were not unlike my grandmother's role in the family. Yet I did not feel that they received the acknowledgement or recognition in the community that they deserved. They were known and respected among the Aboriginal community, but in the broader community of Slave Lake, from my perspective, it seemed that it was the non-Aboriginal people who were

recognized for their contributions to the community. It was as though the indigenous women were invisible, or at least "in the shadows." Perhaps that was the root of my motivation: being invisible, not having a voice, not being equally valued.

That motivation led me to apply for a research grant the year following the RCAP project, while I was in graduate studies. In 1994 my proposal was approved to conduct an oral history project of the Aboriginal people in the Lesser Slave Lake area. I wanted the opportunity to hear the voices of our people, the northern Cree people, *Nehiyaw sakâwiyiniwak*, and to be able to share their voices with others.

I requested my father's assistance as the translator for the interviews and as an advisor. However, because of my commitment to graduate studies and later to full-time employment, I did not have the time to conduct the interviews. Finally, in 1996 I asked my father, Sam, to start the interview process. He was eager to be involved because he was available at that time. He has travelled extensively in the northern communities in his years of community development, as a Native politician and later as a consultant, so he knows many people in the rural communities, on- and off-reserve. My son, Damon, was also available at that time to record the interviews on audio-tape and to transcribe them. Together, they travelled from Edmonton to six northern communities—Calling Lake, Athabasca, Wabasca/Desmarais, Sandy Lake, Widewater, and Slave Lake—conducting interviews. I provided Dad with the interview framework from my proposal as a guide, but he formulated the questions.

He interviewed 12 elders ranging in age from 76 to just under 96 years. The interviews were conducted in Cree or a combination of Cree and English; others were exclusively in English. My dad translated the Cree interviews as summaries of their conversations, not verbatim translations. Copies of their interviews on audio-taped cassettes were sent to each of the elders with English versions of the Cree interviews.

In the fall of 1998 I travelled north with my parents to take photographs of the participants. We also did two follow-up interviews with Mrs. Mary Louise Bellam, who was 88 at the time; and with Mr. Alphonse Beaver, who was 98 years of age. Mrs. Bellam lives on her own in Widewater, near the lake, next door to her grandson. Mr. Beaver also lives on his own, near his son, Francis. It was a delight meeting these two individuals, listening to them share stories in Cree with my parents. They were both in very good health and in good spirits. They attributed their longevity to eating healthy foods such as wild meat, fish, fresh vegetables, and fruit; and to their spiritual beliefs and daily prayers. Although we only did two follow-up interviews, all of the elders had interesting life experiences and a wealth of knowledge to share.

Accomplished *Sakâw* Cree artist, storyteller, and doctoral graduate student, Dale Auger (1997), like Mr. Beaver, is from the Bigstone Cree Nation in northern Alberta. In *First Nations in Canada*, Auger discussed the role of revered elders as important sources of knowledge:

> Our Elders have been a source of knowledge in our community as long as we can remember. They have been our source of knowledge by helping us to be aware of our roots. As the most prominent part of our traditional education, they are themselves the roots of our culture. The role of Elders

> is like that of the roots of a tree. They hold the tree stable; when the wind blows, it is the roots that hold the tree intact. Roots are the foundation.
>
> Just as there are many roots forming the foundation of one tree, so are there many Elders, each one distinct in his or her own right and with his or her own knowledge, forming the foundation of Sakaw Cree traditional education. Through lifelong experience, our Elders are our knowledge-carriers; through their wisdom and spiritual insights, they are our knowledge definers. They have always been there to help those who have wandered, those who wish to find their way back. (p. 332)

He went on to tell a story of an experience he had with "Old Man Beaver," about the lesson that he learned that day, a "young university student driving an old professor to the store" (p. 332). Auger said that "Elders like Grandfather Beaver continue to share their philosophical thoughts on the importance of staying true to one's roots"; and further, that "it is critical to incorporate them as teachers, as knowledge-carriers, into a Sakaw Cree system of education" (p. 333).

In addition to the 12 elders, I interviewed my parents, who are my most valued and respected elders. In Ottawa, during an interview in 1993 with well-known Métis author, teacher, film maker, and activist Maria Campbell, she provided me with some important advice. I shared with her my intent to interview Aboriginal people from my home community so that their wisdom could be shared with others. She told me that my parents are respected elders and that I should begin with them. Sometimes we take for granted those who are closest to us, and we need reminders. I appreciated her guidance. I interviewed my dad in 1993 for the RCAP study and in 1996 and 1998 for the oral history project. His involvement in Métis politics in Alberta for more than 20 years provided him with local, provincial, and international perspectives. His input was invaluable for both projects, and I am very grateful for his insights, knowledge, and experience.

In November 1998, for the first time my mother reluctantly agreed to let me record her story. In the past whenever I asked to interview her for various studies or class assignments, she always deferred to my father. It was only after she read a one-page story I wrote about her parents that she was prompted to tell me about parts that were missing. It was then that I asked if she would let me record her life experiences, mostly of her childhood. It was quite an emotional time for me, listening to her words during the transcribing. It was reminiscent of other Native women I have encountered who negate or diminish the value of their knowledge. Yet their roles are vital to the survival of our culture, of our families, of our communities, and of our nations.

For the oral history project, 6 of the 14 individuals interviewed are married couples. My dad selected the participants. Two non-Aboriginal individuals were interviewed, one in his 80s, the other in his 90s. Dad had known the gentleman in his 90s, Mr. Ben Norberg, for at least 60 years. Unfortunately, he passed away four months after he was interviewed. The other gentleman, Mr. Bob Kreutzer, had lived in Slave Lake since 1927 and was happily married to a local Métis woman, Maggie, for many years. She has since passed on. All the participants provided valuable input to the oral history document. Their photographs are included with their interviews in the *Lesser Slave Lake Aboriginal Oral History* (J. Sinclair, 1998).

The intent of the oral history project was to capture some of the historical knowledge of the indigenous peoples in the area. It was also to promote cross-cultural understanding of Aboriginal people through the sharing of local elder's stories. In addition, I hoped that it would serve to inspire or motivate readers to record and preserve the knowledge of their elders in their families and communities.

The document has been distributed to the elders and has been well received. Feedback from the elders, in some cases from their friends or family members, and from funders has been very positive. Mr. Alphonse Beaver said to his grandson, Charlie Beaver, who delivered the oral history document, that it made him very happy that someone was doing something like this. He also enjoyed seeing photographs of people he knew in the publication.

The positive feedback from the participants, especially the elders, is what I find motivational. It is what feeds me. I get pleasure in knowing that the elders are happy seeing themselves in a publication, that it gives them a sense of pride. And giving them copies of their interviews on audio-tape and on paper is an important part of our culture, the value of reciprocity. Giving back is as important as receiving. In traditional teachings we learn that before we receive, before we even ask, we must first give.

CHAPTER III

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Detail and Demographics

Geographic Location

The Town of Slave Lake is located approximately 250 kilometres northwest of Edmonton on the southeast shore of Lesser Slave Lake in northern Alberta. Lesser Slave Lake extends some 75 miles from its western end near High Prairie, to the eastern end near the town of Slave Lake. Slave Lake is located in Improvement District #17 (now called Municipal District #124). The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) area occupies approximately 60% of the land area of the province and includes 10% of Alberta's population. Within the NADC boundaries are: two major cities, 26 towns, 50 villages, 26 Indian bands, and 8 Métis settlements (Profiles of Regions and Communities in Northern Alberta, 1990).

Highway 2 passes through the southern edge of the town and continues further west and north to High Prairie and Peace River. It is the major route connecting those towns to Edmonton via Highway 44. Highway 88 passes through the east side of Slave Lake, connecting the town to the smaller communities of Peerless Lake, Trout Lake, and Loon Lake, commonly known as the "back lakes," and still further north to Fort Vermilion and High Level. The Bigstone Band reserve is located in Wabasca-Desmarais about 120 kilometres northeast of Slave Lake off Highway 88. Slave Lake is at the junction of Highway 2 and Highway 88 and therefore has a relatively high flow of traffic through it (see Slave Lake area map in Appendix E, Figure 2).

The Sawridge Band reserve is located adjacent to the Town of Slave Lake. The Department of Indian Affairs publication, *Indian Register Population by Sex and Residence 1991,* reports an on-reserve population of 23 and an off-reserve population of 220. The town also attracts Aboriginal peoples from the nearby reserves, those of the Bigstone, Sucker Creek, Driftpile and Kinuso bands, and from other northern Native communities, including those in the "back lakes."

Population Structure

NADC (1991) statistics in *Trends in Northern Alberta: A Statistical Overview 1970-1990* indicate the population of Slave Lake in 1989 as 5,611 (p. A-8). Population growth within the Town of Slave Lake has increased significantly since the "oil boom" of the early 1960s. Between 1961 and 1966 the population increased by 260%; between 1971 and 1976 it grew by 71%; and it has increased steadily during the 1980s, reaching a population of 4,328 in 1981 and 5,611 in 1989 (p. 111).

The demographic characteristics of Slave Lake indicate the age profile of the residents is relatively young. Almost one quarter of the population is between 25 and 34; 39.5% are under 19 years of age, and the seniors account for just 2.2% of the total

population. Of the 5,415 total population in Slave Lake reported by Statistics Canada, 1986, the female population is listed at 2,570 and the male population higher, at 2,845 (NADC, 1991).

The NADC (1990, p. 72) community profile reports that 46.1% of the residents in Improvement District #17 with a single ethnic origin report their heritage as Aboriginal. The 1986 Census (Statistics Canada, 1992) statistics indicate that of the total population of 5,415 in Slave Lake, the Aboriginal population is 1,020, or 18.8% of the total. Of that total, 235 are reported by the census as North American Indian only; 190 as North American Indian and non-Aboriginal; 240 as Métis; 270 as Métis and non-Aboriginal; and 90 as from other multiple Aboriginal origins (p. 88). See Appendix F for a summary of statistics on the Aboriginal peoples in Slave Lake from the 1986 census (Statistics Canada, 1992).

Local Government Organizations

Information about the local clubs, services, organizations and agencies is provided by the Lakelands Family and Community Services, Slave Lake Community Resource Directory 1993. The town is governed by a local municipal government, including the Mayor and Town Council. The town has two federal government offices and offices for numerous provincial government departments. There are a number of other organizations, including recreation and social organizations, cultural and historical societies, and helping services. The Slave Lake Native agencies include Métis Local #77203, Native Counselling Services, Sawridge Band Office, Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre, Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council, and the Zone Five Region of the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Political Organizations and Government Relationships

The provincial Member of the Legislative Assembly, Pearl Calahasen, has an office in Slave Lake. The Métis Local is part of the Zone V Regional Council of the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), which is a member of the Métis National Council. The Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council is a member of the Grand Council of Treaty Eight First Nations, but is not directly affiliated with a national Native organization (see Indian Reserves in Alberta map in Appendix E, Figure 3). There is no local Native women's organization.

Social Service Programs

The Slave Lake Community Resource Directory 1993 lists several local helping services as well as the social and related services provided by Alberta Family & Social Services, Lakelands Family and Community Services Society, Native Counselling Services, Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, Alberta Health—Mental Health Division, North Land Family Counselling, Tawow Options Group Home (Social Services), and Sam Laboucan Centre (Solicitor General).

Economic Structure

Slave Lake is considered an important regional centre for expanding forestry, oil and gas industries, and government services. NADC's (1990) Profiles of Regions and Communities in Northern Alberta (1990) lists the following economic development activities:

- The town's economic base is defined by the oil and gas, forestry, and government services.
- The service and government sectors account for 38% of total employment; 20% of the labour force is employed in primary sector occupations.
- Between 1986 and 1988 development activity was relatively stable at approximately $6 million per year.
- 1989 was a record-setting year with total building permits of $19,334,000.
- New developments include an Alberta Vocational College complex with indoor public pool, two strip malls, and a shopping mall (p.112).

Defining the Community

The community of Slave Lake has changed significantly over several decades. It has changed from a predominantly Aboriginal community to primarily a non-Aboriginal community. The majority of the Native people in the area were non-Status Indians or Métis. Since the oil boom of the 1960s, oil and gas development brought an influx of non-Aboriginal people to the community. More recently, the logging and pulp mill industry has contributed to the increased non-Aboriginal population. For the purpose of this research project, the focus is on the Aboriginal community in the Lesser Slave Lake area..

Contemporary Aboriginal Community Profile

Since 1985, the local Métis community has undergone significant changes. With the 1985 Amendment to the Indian Act (Bill C-31), Indian women who previously lost their Indian status became eligible for reinstatement as Status Indians. Their children also acquired Status. When those first-generation children reached adulthood, and if they married Status Indians, their children and grandchildren became eligible for Indian status. The direct impact of Bill C-31 on the Aboriginal community in Slave Lake has been quite dramatic. Upon its enactment, the percentage of the population officially categorized as Métis underwent a significant decrease in size, whereas the population with Indian Status increased proportionately.

In spite of the changes in Aboriginal status for the Bill C-31s, changes in lifestyles have been minimal, if at all detectable. There does not seem to be any movement to "home" reserves; in fact, individuals from nearby reserves continue to move to Slave Lake. Many of the local Aboriginal people with Indian Status list Sawridge as their band, but they are excluded from band membership status. In recent years Métis families in the Slave Lake area have been taking a more active interest in their Indian ancestry to determine their eligibility to acquire Indian status.

Many of the local Aboriginal people reside in the southeast part of town in houses, apartments, and trailers. The northwest area also has Aboriginal families distributed

throughout; and some live in the northeast and southwest areas (see Town of Slave Lake map in Appendix E, Figure 4). A few Native families still reside outside of the town limits in "Old Town," which was previously known as Sawridge. It is immediately north of the present town site. There are also some Native families in Mitsue, west of Slave Lake, and on reserve land near the town.

CHAPTER IV

HISTORICAL COMPONENT

Introduction

Prior to the mid 1970s, very little historical documentation about the Lesser Slave Lake region existed, apart from journals written by fur traders, the Oblates, and explorers of the North West (e.g., Graham, as cited in Ward, 1995, p. 73; Mackenzie, as cited in Giraud, 1945/1986, p. 43). Their perspectives were largely based on supposition and reflected value judgements about Native peoples' culture and history. In *Native Peoples in Canada,* Frideres (1993) discussed such racist comments historically written about Native people:

> Although some people may object to this claim, racism is undeniably the underlying ideology of the manifest policies regarding Native-White relations throughout the history of Canada. To choose just one indicator, the proceedings of the federal Parliament with regard to Native issues are shot through with racist dogma. (p. 10)

Frideres (1993) provided an example of racist comments in correspondence dated 1880 between Alexander Morris who arranged initial treaties with Native people and the federal government:

> Let us have Christianity and civilization to leaven the masses of heathenism and paganism among the Indian Tribes; let us have a wise and paternal government faithfully carrying out the provisions of our treaties. . . . They [Native people] are wards of Canada; let us do our duty to them. (1880, pp. 296-97)

And here is a statement by the Minister of the Interior in 1902:

> Our position with reference to the Indian is this: We have them with us, and we have to deal with them as wards of the country. There is no question that the method we have adopted [will bring] these people to an improved state. . . . There is a difference between the savage and a person who has become civilized, though perhaps not of a high type.
>
> The reader may claim that these are isolated examples from a different era. However, these statements are representative of the widely prevailing legal, academic and literary attitudes of the time. (Debate of the House of Commons, 2nd sess., 9th Parl., 1902, p. 3046; as cited by Frideres, 1993, p. 10)

Non-Natives had ethnocentric ideas and little knowledge about the people whose actions they observed. Historical literature reflects this bias (e.g., Giraud, 1945/1986, p. 43; Jenness, 1932/1977, pp. 286-287). Such material provides a view of Native people

and their environment since the 18th century, but it cannot give a full picture because the Native perspective is absent.

As Aboriginal people, we rely on elders to pass on their knowledge through oral tradition. Those who know the old ways are usually in their 80s, 90s, or over 100; and they are not easily accessible, particularly the Cree living in northern communities. There are also very few Native people who live long enough to reach those ages. As a consequence of this research project's resource constraints, I was unable to interview the eldest Native people in the community for more detail about local history from their perspective. Some historical information was obtained from those elders who were available for interviews for this project. Mostly, I relied on unpublished regional historical documents and local publications to gain some knowledge of local history. I also used publications about Métis history in the North West to include a broader view.

Although the focus of this project is on traditional decision-making roles of Métis women in the Slave Lake area, it is important to provide an overview of historical events that affected everyone. Social, cultural, economic, and political conditions will be explored through a brief look at the effects of the fur trade, Christianity, governmental influences, political developments, and Euro-Canadian and Indian/Métis relationships. The final area to be addressed will be the role of women in the North West, although the literature addressing women's power in the fur trade is minimal. For the purposes of this thesis, the indigenous people of the Lesser Slave Lake area are referred to as "Cree," except where references to Woodland Cree made by Sawyer and others are quoted.

Early History

In *A History of Lesser Slave Lake*, Geoff Sawyer (1981) discussed some of the archeaological surveys, albeit somewhat superficially, that were completed in the area. In 1964, J. V. Wright (as cited in Sawyer), an expert in boreal forest archaeology from the National Museum of Man in Ottawa, identified four sites in the region that demonstrated evidence of prehistoric habitation. He surmised that

> many other sites would be revealed with more intensive investigation. His belief was based on the fact that he had uncovered the above mentioned in less than one day. In addition, he pointed out that other areas further to the north with considerably less biological base on which to support a subsistence way of life of hunting, fishing, and gathering yielded cultural artifacts, etc., ranging from 5,000 to 12,000 years in age. (p. 5)

Sawyer (1981) went on to discuss subsequent expeditions that revealed other prehistoric sites in the area. He suggested that further studies should be undertaken which would likely be rewarding because the area has a rich and varied biomass:

> In addition to a wealth of small mammals, the region supported large numbers of ungulates (principally moose and wood buffalo), waterfowl, and fish. Such an abundance of food and other related forms of wealth would hardly have been overlooked by the wide ranging peoples of prehistoric times. . . . Moreover, because of its location along one of the

> continent's natural corridors, it has been speculated that the ancestors of virtually all of the Native peoples of both Americas at some point passed somewhere in the vicinity of the lake. (pp. 5-6)

In discussing the early inhabitants of the area prior to the arrival of the first Europeans, Sawyer (1981) acknowledged the uncertainty in identifying their tribal affiliations. He did, however, assert that the arrival of the Cree with the fur trade changed the dynamics of the area:

> They had been forced away from the area by an influx of Woodland Cree Indians, the vanguard of European fur trading activities. It is believed, however, that they spoke the Athapaskan tongue and belonged to either the Beaver, Sarcee, or possibly Slave tribal communities. . . . Of all the tribes that might have inhabited the shores of Lesser Slave Lake in prehistoric times, the most likely to have been the predominant group were the Beaver Indians. . . . In any event, the Woodland Cree were constantly making war against the Beaver. After European penetration began, the white man tried to discourage intertribal warfare. It wasn't good for trade. (pp. 7-8)

There is widespread acceptance among historians and ethnologists that all Cree bands lived to the east of Lake Winnipeg prior to European contact. According to this view, they acquired guns from the English and French, which gave them technical superiority over the western tribes as they moved west, conquering lands to the Peace River and the Rocky Mountains. Some writers have said that the Cree preceded the European fur traders who arrived in the late 18th century by only a few years.

However, writers such as James G. E. Smith (1987) considered the theory that Cree bands were all located east of Lake Winnipeg and the Nelson River to be a myth based on early records:

> The root of the myth is to be found in misinterpretations of Sir Alexander Mackenzie's narrative of his explorations in 1789 and 1793. While Mackenzie wrote that the Cree were newcomers in the west, he never indicated when they arrived, and asserted there was no knowledge of the identity of their predecessors. The initial assignment of a date was made by Albert Gallatin (1836), who wrote that peace was established 80 years before his publication. There is no evidence in the literature to establish any date. His figure, however, was accepted by Petitot later in the 19th century, and was then embodied in the influential Handbook of North American Indians (Hodge 1907-10). Thereafter, it was an accepted fact that the Cree arrived at the Peace River boundary shortly before the first Europeans arrived. (p. 444)

Smith (1987) argued that the Cree were not recent arrivals in the west when European explorers arrived:

> The argument that Cree moved west because of the depletion of big game or fur-bearing animals is without empirical evidence. Big game and fur-bearing populations did decrease seriously in the alleged homeland, but not until the very late 18th and 19th centuries. There is no evidence that a war of territorial conquest took place. To argue such a war took place is a proposal without precedent in the boreal forest. . . .
>
> The evidence given by the Cree from the 18th century to the present is that they have always lived in the area from Lake Winnipeg to the Peace River (1987, p.444).

Historians and anthropologists generally accepted the theory that the Cree people of the north were Woodland Cree. In the *Handbook of North American Indians*, Smith (1981) referred to them as "Western Woods Cree," which includes the Rocky Cree, the western Swampy Cree, and the Strongwoods or Bois Fort Cree. He observed that in the West they occupy

> the boreal forest west of Hudson and James Bays, including the northern portions of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. . . . The history of the Western Woods Cree has not yet been adequately pursued by scholars, but accumulating evidence indicates that earlier interpretations of territorial movements are incorrect. It has generally been considered that the western Cree represent a late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century westward migration resulting from the depletion of game and fur-bearing animals in the region east of Lake Winnipeg (Jenness 1932:284; Hlady 1964; A.D. Fisher 1969; Pentland 1978:109-110).However, there is evidence that although the Swampy Cree were migrating during this period, the Rocky and Strongwoods Cree had been long present in the west. (pp. 256-257)

Beryl C. Gillespie (1981) noted that the difficulty of identifying peoples with specific areas in "truly aboriginal times" is further complicated by the influences of the fur trade:

> The period of intensive fur-trade competition and expansion, 1790-1821, in the Lesser Slave Lake, Lac la Biche, and Peace River areas brought intrusions of Métis, Assiniboin, Iroquois, and Ojibwa as well as Cree (Thompson 1916:307,311; A.M Johnson 1967:196,216,242; MacGregor 1966:115-116,121-122; C. Robertson 1939; Simpson 1938:376-388, 1968:20-21,30; J. N. Wallace 1929:34,53; Henry 1897, 2:510). Initially hired into the fur trade or attracted to new sources of furs, these peoples became permanent residents, and no doubt some of their descendants are members of groups recorded as Cree by the Canadian government (Canada. Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Indian Affairs Branch 1970:26-27) in these locales in the twentieth century. (pp. 165-166)

Evidence of the presence of several Indian tribal groups can be seen in place names in northern Alberta. In *Lesser Slave Lake: A Regional History,* D. R. Babcock (1975) pointed out that modern maps of the area suggest elements of the history because the land bears the prints of its people over the years:

> Evidence of several Indian tribal groups is revealed in such place names as Iroquois Lakes, Saulteaux River, Fort Assiniboine, Ottauwa River, Chipewyan Lakes, and the prevalence of such Cree place names as Wabasca, Muskwa, Kinuso and Utikuma. (p. 4)

Babcock also discussed the European influences on place names in the area, which are linked with early missionaries, voyageurs, and the English, Scottish, and Orkney immigrants of the fur trade who became the paternal ancestors of many who remain in the area (p. 6).

The tribe that had the greatest impact in the Lesser Slave Lake area was the Cree. The Crees established themselves as the preferred tribe to deal with the forts and developed a reputation for being peaceful toward the traders. Sawyer (1981) discussed the European influences on the Cree, which were becoming more evident:

> By the early 1800s, the adaptability of the Woodland Cree caused them to increasingly abandon their traditional way of life, including modes of dress, religion, and other significant aspects of their culture, in favor of European practices. Many white traders took Cree women as wives. The offspring of such biracial unions came to be known as Métis. This ethnic group would come to play an important role in the subsequent history of Canada's west. (pp. 16-17)

The Fur Trade in the Lesser Slave Lake Area

In 1799 the first fur-trading post was built by the North West Company at the mouth of the Lesser Slave River. They had a monopoly in the fur trade until 1815, when the Hudson's Bay Company moved into the area and constructed the first of three posts that they built over a period of four years. The Indians were caught between the fur-trading companies who used alcohol as a vital part of trade:

> The North West Company Highlanders raised the ante in this grim contest when they began to indiscriminately ply the natives with 'fire water' in large doses. This practice was exactly counter to the policy of the Hudson's Bay Company's London Committee, who appear to have been genuinely motivated by attitudes of decency and benevolence in their dealing with the Indians. . . . This does not mean, however, that the Hudson's Bay Company factors were above using liquor as an inducement to the Cree trappers to change trading posts. (Sawyer, 1981, p. 34)

Alcohol abuse was also becoming a problem during the early part of the 19th century at the Lesser Slave Lake outposts. Sawyer (1981) discussed the disastrous affects of the abuse of alcohol in the fur trade industry:

> At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the quantity of "Fiery Double Distilled Rum," the product of the West Indian sugar trade taken into the northwest more than doubled from 10,098 gallons in 1800 to over 21,300 in 1803. These spirits might have been a powerful weapon for the rival companies to induce thirsty Indians to bring in their furs, but the net result was disastrous for all concerned. For the Indians, it was a personal tragedy. The result for the traders was a general decline of their good relations with their native partners upon whom they depended. (p. 17)

Some considered the traders' use of liquor in the fur trade as the only means to motivate the Indians to provide the much-sought-after fur. William P. Baergen (1967) discussed the use of liquor in the competition and argued that the traders disliked its use in the long run because the efficiency of their hunters was reduced, and hence the profits were also reduced:

> Had the Hudson's Bay Company had a monopoly on the whole continent, it is fair to assume that liquor would have been forbidden from the outset. Under the pressure of competition, however, the only way the European trader could make himself master of the trading situation was by exploiting the natives' passion for liquor. . . . Sordid though the liquor traffic may have been, it was the acceptance of the fact that its use was the only means of prying loose the Indian from his commanding position and making him, in Rich's words, "an eager buyer instead of a reluctant seller" that forced the trader to use it more and more extensively. (pp. 61-62)

Regardless of the intent, the European influences that accompanied the fur trade radically changed the traditional Cree way of life.

By 1821, the trading rivals merged into a newly reorganized Hudson's Bay Company, resulting in a duplication of facilities in the area. Thus, at the west end of Lesser Slave Lake, the post known as Waterloo House was abandoned in favour of the former North West Company post, which subsequently was referred to as Lesser Slave Lake House. Sawyer (1981) discussed the prohibition of liquor in the fur trade by the HBC Committee in London during the postamalgamation years and the abundance of furs trapped in the area:

> By 1830, this amounted to a state of virtual prohibition that, north of Athabasca Landing, lasted well into the twentieth century. This caused the thirstier of the Cree that traded at Lesser Slave Lake to take their furs to Fort Edmonton where rum was more readily available. In spite of the liquor prohibition, Lesser Slave Lake House alone produced more than a third of all the furs in its 40-post district. Besides its importance as a fur producer,

the post became a key location as traffic increased into the Peace River country and beyond. (p. 37)

In the following years the trading post remained an import influence in the lives of the people in the area. Sawyer (1981) discussed its revered position:

> During these years, respect for the Hudson's Bay Company was virtually universal north of Edmonton. All—Indians, Métis, and white alike—saw the venerable trading firm as honourable and fair dealing. The natives were especially loyal—as were its white employees. And the higher one stood in its hierarchy, the more venerated that individual would be. (p. 38)

But as times changed, the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly would be successfully challenged. Population growth, the coming of the steamboats, a railway, and an auto route all decreased the prominence of the its role in the community (pp. 38-39).

The fur business in Lesser Slave Lake was still not over. Sawyer (1981) provided an update of the fur industry in the area:

> In the years that followed the end of World War II, a number of mink farms were established in the area. The rich fishery in the lake provided the food. In time, however, this proved to be uneconomical for a variety of reasons. Today there are no mink ranches remaining. On the other hand, there are still Cree trappers around Lesser Slave Lake who continue to earn a livelihood from this traditional way of life; there probably will continue to be for many years to come. (p. 39)

Religious Influences

Sawyer (1981) pointed out the religious influences on the Cree in the area in the early to mid 1800s:

> The numerous social problems that plague[d] . Woodland Cree at the Lesser Slave Lake, as elsewhere, eventually attracted the attention of the religious orders, especially the Catholic Church. In 1845, Father Joseph Bourassa opened a mission at Lesser Slave Lake Settlement, the beginning of a service that lasts to this day. (p. 18)

Missionaries from other denominations such as Anglican, Wesleyan, and Protestant also made periodic visits to the area, beginning in 1842. However, their influence was not as strong as that of the Catholic church:

> The Oblate mission at Lesser Slave Lake used Cree Indians as catechists and lay readers in their masses. Before long, such practices had exerted a strong influence over a wide portion of the Native population.
>
> The missionaries also opened up a residential boarding school. Ostensibly this was to make teaching more efficient by having all the

> children in one place at the same time, but it also carried the hidden purpose of removing them from the 'pagan' influence of their parents. (Sawyer, 1981, p. 18)

During the fur trade, the Indians were subjected to conflicting aspirations of the Hudson's Bay Company and the missionaries. The company had a vested interest in nomadic hunters in their efforts to obtain fur. The missionaries, on the other hand, promoted a more sedentary agricultural way of life as a means to develop a stronger economic base, but also to make the task of conversion and education more feasible. Babcock (1975) discussed the conflict between the Christian religious orders, with each of them preaching that their God and their Church was the right path to follow:

> Catholic and Protestant missionaries saw the other as the very evil against which they laboured. For one, heathenism and heresy were twin abominations, while for the other, paganism and papacy were equal in evil. This mutual hostility injected a discordant theme of bitter competition in the missionary enterprise from the very beginning which bred confusion and division among the natives grappling with the intricacies of the white man's medicine. Missionary strategies under the circumstances were not unlike political power struggles, and the religious rivalry became reminiscent of the earlier struggle for the fur trade in the Lesser Slave Lake area. (pp. 139-140)

By the turn of the century both the Church of England and the Oblates were established in the area. They saw great possibilities in working with Native children who were more controllable than their parents. Babcock (1975) discussed the efforts made during the first decades of the 20th century to Christianize the children through education in boarding schools, which were considered preferable to day schools:

> As boarders the children became virtually captive clients, removed entirely from a social milieu deemed to be both heathen and uncivilized. . . . The boarding school was an experience in total immersion in an environment planned to inculcate Christian values, elementary academic skills, and the ability to perform certain tasks, in that order of priority (p. 157)

After the signing of Treaty Eight in 1899, the federal government paid the boarding schools for the upkeep of their Indian students. No such arrangements were available to the Half-breeds, resulting in the churches requesting funds on their behalf. Babcock (1975) referred to Indian Affairs' records where, in October 1890, Bishop Grouard wrote to Prime Minister Laurier requesting grants and expressing his concern for the Half-breeds in his diocese:

> We have in this country a certain number of halfbreeds. Many of them took the treaty of last year; it was best for them, for their manner of nomadic life, their means of existence, i.e., fishing and hunting, are absolutely the same as those of the Indians. But this year they wished to leave the treaty

> and received scrip. Thus in actual fact, they are now in an infinitely inferior position to that of the other Indians, above all, in regard to the education of their children. . . . But these so-called halfbreeds, who are as nomadic as the Indians, who cannot help themselves to keep from being nomads, if they wish to live—what are they to do with their children? Who are not morally or physically distinguished from the Indian children. . . . Otherwise, as I have already explained to you, these unhappy halfbreed children will find themselves in a disastrously inferior position which will not produce any good result for the future (PAC, RG10 Black, Vol. 3781). (p. 160)

Although the residential schools were for the Treaty Indians, Métis children ended up there for a variety of reasons. Families were large, and if they were particularly poor, some of the children were sent to the missions. Some children fathered by men other than their mother's current husband were sent to residential schools. In other cases Métis children wanted to go to school and would stay there for a year or more. But the Treaty Indian children had no choice; they had to go.

Babcock (1975) pointed out the deplorable conditions of the boarding schools, which resulted in disease and numerous deaths:

> Dr. Peter Bryce, appointed chief health officer for Indian Affairs in 1905, immediately began a comprehensive study of the health of Canada's Indians. A year later he inspected thirty-five schools in the west, including several in Alberta. His shocking discovery was that a quarter of the Indians who had attended residential schools during the previous fifteen years had died, chiefly of tuberculosis. The schools were breeding grounds for the disease for children were assembled in often crowded dormitories and classrooms that in winter were poorly ventilated to save on fuel expenses. (p. 161)

In addition to disease, alcohol, and social problems, the loss of the spiritual belief systems had a devastating effect on the Native people. But at a time of unprecedented social and economic change, the manner and form in which Christianity was introduced eroded precisely those psychological and spiritual mechanisms which had enabled Native people to cope successfully with such change.

Sawyer (1981) discussed the social structure and spiritual practices of the Cree who tended to live in small groups:

> These were often no larger than a single family. Larger gatherings were reserved for special occasions such as religious ceremonies. Because of this, the Woodland Cree did not maintain a strong tribal identity, nor did they develop the complex social and religious structure of their brothers on the plains.
>
> They were, nevertheless, a deeply religious people. This stemmed from their isolated lives and frequent struggles with the elements and starvation. Thus, they often called for supernatural help for protection. (p. 11)

Sawyer remarked that because of "this prowess with magic," such as using supernatural powers against their enemies, "other Indians were inclined to be fearful of the Woodland Cree" (p. 12).

The missionaries generally took a negative and judgemental view of Native spiritual beliefs and practices and an uncritical view of their own European religious heritage. In consequence, they insisted that Native people both adopt Christianity, as understood by the missionaries, and abandon their own spiritual heritage. The missionaries did not, apparently, wish to engage in a process of religious enculturation or syncretism.

Without the assistance of further research it is difficult to assess the extent to which local Cree people were successful in the process of creating their own religious syntheses. In 1994, in the community of Loon Lake, situated 170 kilometres north of Lesser Slave Lake, I had an opportunity to meet a Cree woman who was 107 years old. She talked of Native traditional practices as well as Christian beliefs. She was baptized a Roman Catholic at age 11, near the turn of the century. During the course of the conversation, she stated that her parents and grandparents were also traditionalists and Roman Catholics.

This example suggests that some Native people engage in spiritual syncretism. In spite of efforts to eradicate traditional spirituality and practices, "aboriginal spiritual beliefs have displayed a remarkable vitality and indeed have been enjoying a renaissance" (Dickason, 1992, p. 419). The following testimony from the RCAP interviews supports that view:

> Even the Native people are starting to come out more than they used to. It used to be hidden. It was there when we were young, but they feared it. They never talked about it. . . . Now, people are starting to come out now, even the healers. Now it's wide open. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

New Social and Cultural Patterns

The effects of the fur trade were obvious in the first quarter of the 19th century as new social and cultural patterns took root in the Lesser Slave Lake area and fused with traditional ways:

> Hundreds of tons of European artifacts were brought into the area and many tons of pelts, chiefly beaver, were taken out. These new artifacts quickly displaced aboriginal artifacts and the Cree, Chipewyan and Beaver Indians became dependent on the traders for their supply. . . . Specialized occupations and roles appeared where traditional social organization was characterized by generalized roles involving many skills; now a man could become a full-time hunter, trapper, guide, interpreter or canoeman and receive a wage from one of the companies, as well as a relative status in the fur trade hierarchy (Babcock, 1975, pp. 52-53)

Babcock (1975) addressed some of the adjustments that were made as the traditional indigenous lifestyle became commercialized with the fur trade:

> Though the Indians do not seem to have become acquisitive in the European sense of that word, they were hard bargainers. They did not, in general, try to accumulate wealth either as a capital to aid in production or as a hoard to be treasured. . . . Yet they were acutely aware of variations in price and quality and would undertake long journeys to secure better bargains. When they thought they were being unjustly treated they would refuse to trade at all even if their requirements were still unsatisfied. (Rich, p. 94; as cited in Babcock, p. 53)

The period following 1821 was critical for the Native people of the area as they struggled to contend with new diseases, diminishing wildlife, and a new colonial economic system over which they had little control:

> As monopoly controls were enforced, the natives' degree of autonomy was eroded and, as in so many other parts of the world, they found themselves bound to a colonial economic system which, humanely paternalistic as it was, nevertheless exerted a relentless compulsion over their lives. Unlike other colonial conquests, there were few visible signs of force—no army occupied their territory—but their very need for blankets, guns, steel tools and liquor placed them just as effectively in the control of the London-based system. . . . Scattered, divided and diminishing in numbers, the Indians and halfbreeds were unable to concertedly challenge the company's rule. (Babcock, 1975, p.106)

At the end of the 19th century, the social patterns were altered significantly due to increased White settlement, especially at the lake's west end:

> The credit system at the Hudson's Bay Company post was beginning to break down. This was due to the influence of easy money brought in by Klondikers and the rise of independent traders like Bredin and Cornwall. Added to this was a growing apprehension on the part of Cree leaders that new settlers would take away their traditional lands. (Sawyer, 1981, pp. 19-20)

In 1899, Treaty 8 was negotiated with the Cree, Beaver, Slave, and Chipewyan bands, with the principal meeting held at the Lesser Slave Lake settlement. Although some were granted treaty Status, their movement was restricted to traditional lands:

> Anyone claiming to be a full blooded Indians would receive a cash settlement of 15 dollars and treaty Indian status. Métis were given a quarter section of land (64.75 hectares). This was not, however, as acquisitive as it might appear. Among the Klondikers were many western Americans who considered Indians to be several pegs below human status.

> Alarmed at the casual slaughter threatened and practiced by such men, government deemed it wiser to make a pact that would safeguard the Indians. Limiting their freedom to move about their traditional grounds seemed the lesser of two evils. Moreover, the Natives had complete access to any land held by the Crown that was not being used for other purposes. At the time, this still included the greatest part of the region around the lake. (Sawyer, 1981, p. 20)

Thereafter, the Cree continued to resist being tied to a particular piece of land. They were free to continue hunting, fishing, and trapping on unoccupied land under the terms of the Treaty.

Native and Euro-Canadian Relationships

The relationships between Native people and Euro-Canadian people over a 200-year history developed a unique tradition, technology, and set of practices referred to as "fur trade culture." Because the fur trade was the only commercial industry in the Lesser Slave Lake area during the first century of its history and the primary context in which the two races met and interacted, it might be regarded as the mold in which those relationships were fashioned and which became the precedents for subsequent interaction (Babcock, 1975, p. 57). Babcock suggested that present ethnic relations represent a continuation of the kinds of interaction established during the heyday of the fur trade (p. 57).

In a 1963 study of the communities along the south shore of Lesser Slave Lake, The Métis in Alberta Society, the relationship between White and Native people is illustrated in the occupational structure:

> The occupational structure of the area is truncated at the executive and managerial levels, extensive at the level of unskilled and semi-skilled occupations. Persons of Indian ancestry are confined to this lowest level, with the exception of a few "good workers" who have reached supervisory positions. There is a limited number and range of occupations in the area, especially for Métis or Indian female workers. In the 1960 opinion-attitude climate generated by each economic sector there was wide-spread concern about "problems" attributed to Métis and Indian workers, and also a prevailing mood of apathy or discouragement which was associated with the area's limited prospects for economic development. (Card, p.387; as cited in Babcock, 1975, pp. 9-10)

Babcock (1975) contended that there were numerous informal barriers to Native participation in the social life of the area as indicated in the local study:

> Whites tended to consider native people inferior and to attribute feelings of inferiority to them, to accept native children and old people, but to reject native youths and adults. . . . Finally, a variety of customs and etiquette, such as segregated seating in public places, served to keep native people at a safe distance from whites. (p. 10)

Aboriginal people became disadvantaged socially, culturally, and economically as a consequence of their interaction with non-Native society. In *We Are Metis: A Metis View of the Development of a Native Canadian People,* Duke Redbird (1980) referred to a study that was conducted in the 1960s that reflected a negative perception of Native people in the area:

> In the early sixties (1961) a research study was conducted in the Lesser Slave Lake area to determine the self-image evaluation of native children. . . . In that area at least, Métis children rated themselves eighth on a scale of twenty-one. Indians, in fact, rated Métis higher (sixth) than the Métis rated themselves, but not as low as they were rated by whites—seventeenth. The revival of native awareness would probably change the scale if the test were done today. (pp. 51-52)

In his study *Community Development Programs in Alberta: Analysis of Development Efforts in Five Communities*, Edward Bhajan (1972) attributed the socio-economic gap between Native and non-Native peoples to historical circumstances. In the 1960s a community development program was initiated to improve social and economic conditions of Native people in Alberta:

> Despite rapid advances in the field of economic, social and cultural growth in the Province of Alberta during the 1950s and early 1960s, the native population of Alberta was never in the vanguard of such developments, due largely to historic circumstances. On the contrary, native communities were characterized by increasing welfare subsidies, a diminishing traditional economic base and the absence of adequate health facilities. In view of this situation, the Government of Alberta initiated a community development program with the expressed purpose of bettering the social and economic conditions which characterized native communities. In so doing, they hoped to reduce welfare payments and enable the native population to merge into the mainstream of Canadian life in a meaningful way. (p. 1)

In the mid 1960s a sudden increase in resource exploitation resulted in a major population shift. There are no statistics to demonstrate the ratio of Native to non-Native people; however, as one informant explained, "Up to the early 1950s, the Native/white ratio was approximately 80%/20%. As the oil development moved in, it evened out in the early 1960s" (S. J. Sinclair, November 22, 1993). Over a period of four decades, the Native/White ratio of the population has reversed itself to 82% non-Native and 18% Native (1986 Census, Statistics Canada, 1992).

There are diverse opinions about the historical and contemporary relationships between White and Native people in the Lesser Slave Lake area. Some people say that there was no racism in the community, that everyone was treated equally; whereas others admit that racism existed. In an article, "Portrait of a Busy Woman", J. M. Holt (1984) revealed one Métis woman's experiences with racism. E. Norberg discussed the difficulty of maintaining pride in her Métis heritage because of the attitudes of non-Natives in the community: "People were inclined to stereotype anyone with native blood," she remembered. "Too often we were classified as lazy, shiftless, drunken and dirty. Sometimes it was very hard to keep on fighting to prove myself" (p. 71).

In spite of the prevalence of discrimination, the town is continually perceived by some as being socially and ethnically integrated. Jean Chretien, then federal Minister of Justice, was quoted at a local public gathering in Slave Lake on the ethnic integration and the spirit of the community:

> There are lessons for all of Canada in communities such as Slave Lake. . . . My reception here was symbolic of the kind of things that keep Canada together. . . . I was met by a mayor who came from South Africa. I shared lunch with natives and whites, anglophones and francophones, all sorts of people living, meeting and working together. . . . It's too bad the spirit of Slave Lake is lacking in some parts of Canada. ("Slave Lake's Spirit Praised," 1984, p. 247)

From an outsider's perspective, it may appear that the community is ethnically integrated, but others would disagree.

Even when Native people become successful in improving their socio-economic status, it does not necessarily mean that they will be fully accepted by the White community. This lack of acceptance was recently expressed by a Métis resident in Slave Lake: "It's strange because all of a sudden, 'You're my friend as long as you don't make anything out of yourself. I just want to see you as a drunken Indian walking down the street.' . . . These kinds of things you realize when you start doing something for yourself" (F. Auger, personal interview, June 30, 1993).

Interview results suggest that the colour of people's skin is a determining factor in whether or not they experience discrimination. The shame associated with identifying as a Native person still exists:

> There's a lot of Native blood in this area, but they won't come out and say so. I guess I'm trying to say that they're trying to pass off as White people. Some of them are blonde and blue-eyed, but their background is Native, and they're not identifying themselves as Native but as citizens of Slave Lake. (F. Auger, 1993)

Métis people who cannot "pass" as White are more apt to experience discrimination.

Native people who gave up their culture and integrated with the White population may have been perceived as being successfully integrated, whereas traditional and often poorer people are looked down upon. The change in lifestyle that occurred with the

exploitation of resources is seen by the White and acculturated Native people in positive terms. Others who value the traditional Cree way of life consider it to be a significant loss:

> The oil industry took lots of fur out of the land; it scares the fur-bearing animals out with all that noise. We don't hardly see any more of those animals. We're lucky if we even see a bear. We saw one coyote and a couple deer. The oil industry is interfering, and logging too, with the hunting and trapping. Animals don't go close. (Interview #1, Appendix A)

Historically, resource exploitation began with the fur trade and continues today with oil and logging practices. Native people in the Lesser Slave Lake area continue to experience significant impacts on their way of life.

The Formation of the Métis Association and Métis Settlements

In *The One-and-a-Half Men* (1981), Murray Dobbin (1981) described the Métis in northern Alberta as follows:

> The Métis of the northern bushland, though they were mixed bloods, lived the same life as the Indians of that area—the nomadic life of the fur trapper—and shared little of the national sentiment of their southern cousins. . . . These former Indians and their nomadic mixed blood cousins made up a large portion of the "Métis" population of Alberta by the 1930s—perhaps as many as one-third of the estimated 10-12,000 population (the vast majority of whom lived in the north central region of the province and the Peace River district). It was to this group of native people that the whites most viciously applied the derogatory status of Half Breed. (p. 55)

At the outset of the Depression in the 1930s, the situation for the Métis in northern Alberta was critical. Babcock (1975) described their desperate situation as "abject poverty, illiteracy, social and geographical isolation, landlessness and physical degeneration" (p. 301). Their desperate plight led to the organization of the Métis Association of Alberta and the Northwest Territories in 1932. During that year the Association stressed the need for action to the government of Alberta, especially for immediate land reserves and educational facilities for Halfbreeds and non-Treaty Indians. In 1934, the Halfbreed Commission was formed under the Public Inquiries Act to study the condition of the Halfbreeds in Alberta, paying particular attention to their health, education, relief, and general welfare. The resulting report indicated an estimated Halfbreed population of 11,000 in Alberta and confirmed the deplorable conditions under which they were forced to live (Babcock, pp. 301-302).

The Halfbreed Commission, chaired by Justice A. F. Ewing of the Supreme Court of Alberta, heard about the nomadic nature of the Métis and that it was pointless to set aside land for them since they were not interested in becoming farmers. In *Canada's First Nations*, Dickason (1992) revealed some of their findings:

> Northern Métis were nomads by nature and not prepared to convert themselves as long as their ecological base remained sound; some were even reported to be well off. . . . The situation was totally different in central and southern Alberta. . . . There the Métis were without land and without a subsistence base; in fact, they were destitute, malnourished, and had severe health problems. Up to 80 per cent were illiterate. . . . Those in the north were better off, but precariously so. All were without education and health services. As the Commission saw it, the only way out of the situation was for the Métis to change their way of life to conform with that of the dominant society. (p.362)

Prior to the release of the Ewing Commission's findings and recommendations in 1936, the Métis Association of Alberta proposed that the provincial government establish 11 Métis colonies. They also proposed that farm colonies be established on good agricultural land, near lakes well stocked with fish, and have access to timber. Among other recommendations, Dickason (1992) reported that they

> also recommended that northern hunting and trapping Métis should each be granted 320 acres (130 hectares) of land to be held on the same basis as if they were in the colonies. Further, they should be allowed free hunting and fishing permits, as well as preference in acquiring them in areas where there was danger of game depletion. (p. 363)

The Ewing Commission Report resulted in the Métis Population Betterment Act (1938), which was the most advanced legislation relating to the Métis in Canada. Out of 12 locations initially selected, 10 were established as Métis colonies in central and northern Alberta. Eight of the colonies, currently known as Métis "settlements," remain today and comprise 539,446 hectares (Dickason, 1992, p. 363). Alberta is the only province in Canada to designate land for Métis.

With the signing of the Alberta Métis Settlement Accord on July 1, 1989, four pieces of provincial legislation were enacted: the Métis Settlement Accord Implementation Act, the Constitution of Alberta Amendment Act, the Métis Settlements Land Protection Act, and the Métis Settlements Act. All four pieces of legislation were proclaimed on November 1, 1990. Also flowing from the Accord was the transfer in fee simple of 1.25 million acres of land and a financial package to be used as what is perceived to be "catch-up" monies for the infrastructure on the settlements. The package was transferred to the Métis Settlements General Council, formerly known as the Federation of Métis Settlements.

The Métis Association of Alberta, now known as the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), also entered into a special arrangement with the provincial government. In 1987 a framework agreement was signed that was designed to work towards greater autonomy, with the goal of achieving self-government for the Métis in Alberta. The MNA continues to strive for greater control in the fields of justice, education, housing, and other issues.

Métis women's organizations, on the other hand, struggle to obtain recognition and support from male-dominated Aboriginal organizations and government departments. Former President of the Women of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and President of the

National Métis Women of Canada, Marge Friedel, expressed her disappointment with the lack of support:

> The moment a Métis women's organization is perceived as having power, the male-dominated Native organizations utilize 'divide and conquer' tactics to silence the voices of the women. . . . I believe the problems that exist within Native political organizations is happening because the distribution of grants by governments is feeding the greed within existing organizations. Decisions are being made by Native political leaders based upon the need for ongoing funding and not the needs and aspirations of the Native community. (Friedel, February 1, 1994)

Aboriginal political leaders such as former Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Ovide Mercredi recognized that advocacy for collective rights would require a focus on healing:

> To have the strength to advocate for our collective rights, we have to be involved in the healing of our people; . . . that should be the mission of the First Nations, . . . to heal the people and provide them with non-violent societies in which to live. . . . That's what I'm going to focus on. (Lee, 1993, p. A7)

Today, many Aboriginal people seek traditional ways to help in healing individuals, families, communities, and nations. A teaching of the braid is used as a reminder that the past, present, and future are connected to one another—everything that we are today is a result of our ancestors, everything that we become will contribute to the children not yet born (L. Sinclair, March 29, 1994).

Native Women's Role in the Northwest

There is a dearth of historical literature written about Métis women, especially from female perspectives. Though there is a scarcity of such material, one should not conclude that their roles in their communities were insignificant or unequal. To supplement existing literature, we look to oral transmission of history and experience to gain a broader understanding of their roles. In *Women and Colonization*, Etienne and Leacock (1980) pointed out the biases that exist in the perception and collection of data:

> The preconceptions that affect the perception and collection of data also limit the validity of interpretations, even when these are based on accurate and relatively complete information. Our concepts relating to equality and inequality derive from the experience of our own society and this experience is often inappropriately projected onto the institutions and behaviours of others. (p. 4)

Etienne and Leacock stated that "such interpretations make the unproven assumption that women do not participate in decision making and that separate spheres make unequal

spheres" (p. 4). In describing the changing roles of Métis women in local governance, we need to examine their roles historically from a variety of perspectives.

For the purpose of this paper, the roles of Métis women can be better understood by examining the position of Indian women in the fur trade, because Métis are most often descendants of Indian mothers and European fathers. In *Strangers in Blood*, Brown (1980) pointed out:

> These mixed-blood descendants of the fur trade joined a common cause that emphasized their maternal descent, in contradiction to the dominantly patrilineal and patrifocal familial structures, that, with their orientation toward the 'civilized world,' had guided many of their peers toward higher social standing as whites and gentlemen. (p. 219)

Often, with the frequent absenteeism of fur-trade fathers, Métis offspring more commonly were influenced by the Indian heritage of their mothers.

In *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870*, John Milloy (1988) discussed the critical roles of Native women in the fur trade which are not adequately addressed in historical documents:

> Native women, it is known, had an important internal economic role within the subsistence pattern as small-game hunters and gatherers, and a critical role related to trade as the "work force" that produced finished furs for exchange. Unfortunately, the "male"-oriented sources, both oral and documentary, provide little information that allows a reconstruction of Plains Cree women's experience and its integration into the trade and military patterns, and thus these women are yet hidden from history. (p. xvii)

In *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, John E. Foster (1985) wrote about the difficulty in gaining an appreciation for women's roles in the fur trade because of the male bias in existing literature and the variance of their roles:

> Among mixed-blood populations, the world of adult females was of some, if not equal or greater, importance in the sharing of experiences that became institutionalized as Métis ways. Unfortunately the male bias of the documents renders it most difficult to garner an appreciation of these experiences. The relevant existing literature emphasizes the experiences of the officers' wives and daughters in the years after 1820. . . .
>
> It is most difficult to gain an appreciation of the shared experiences of the women when individual experience seemed to range from those who were items of barter among the men to those who managed their circumstances so as to establish positions of respect and influence. ("The Problem of Métis Roots," p. 84)

In the article "From 'One Nation' in the Northeast to 'New Nation' in the Northwest: A Look at the Emergence of the Métis," Olive P. Dickason (as cited in

Peterson & Brown, 1985) discussed the recent attention being paid to women's roles in the fur trade. In addition, she addressed the differences in attitudes toward marriage:

> In the eastern trade, no less than that of the Northwest, women played a vital role because of their family connections and because of their particular skills. Only recently have historians begun to pay attention to this fundamental aspect of our early history. . . .
>
> Such an arrangement for accommodating fur traders was facilitated by attitudes of Amerindians toward marriage. While kinship was all-important to them, they did not consider marriage to be necessarily permanent, particularly if no children were involved. Besides, *polygyny* [the taking of more than one wife] was an integral part of their social and economic framework. (p. 24)

Marital views differed between European and Native cultures. In *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870*, Sylvia Van Kirk (1980) discussed the difference in views of marriage, including polygamous relationships as economic necessity:

> Most Indian tribes did not hold the marriage bond to be indissoluble. David Thompson observed, if "they cannot live peaceably together, they separate with as little ceremony as they came together, and both parties are free to attach themselves to whom they will, without any stain on their characters." All the western tribes were polygamous. A plurality of wives was often an economic necessity, a man's prestige being enhanced by the number of wives he could support. The traders, however, were inclined to reflect their own cultural prejudice against polygamy, pointing out that it gave rise to jealous, sometimes murderous, quarrels among the women. (p. 24)

Van Kirk (1980) stated that initially the Indians supported the marriage alliances between their women and the traders as a socio-economic advantage:

> The Indian viewed marriage in an integrated social and economic context; a marital alliance created a reciprocal social bond which served to consolidate his economic relationship with a stranger. Thus, through marriage, the trader was drawn into the Indian's kinship circle. And in return for giving the traders sexual and domestic rights to their women, the Indians expected reciprocal privileges such as free access to the posts and provisions. The marriage of a daughter to a fur trader brought prestige and the promise of security to an Indian family. (pp. 28-29)

Marital unions between the traders and Indian women were perceived as being advantageous to the women by some, but Van Kirk (1980) questioned whether or not it was an improvement:

> With regard to Indian women, most of the fur traders believed that women occupied a degraded position within western Indian societies; the Indian woman in their view had everything to gain by becoming the wife of the "superior" trader. In reality the Indian woman may have enjoyed an easier existence at the fur-trade post, but she sacrificed considerable personal autonomy, being forced to adjust to the traders' patriarchal views on the ordering of home and family. In the final analysis, it is debatable whether the lot of an Indian woman in marrying a European was improved to the extent that the fur traders claimed. (pp. 6-7)

Regardless of whether or not it worked to their advantage to be married to the traders, Van Kirk (1980) said that evidence supports the fact that Indian women took the initiative in seeking to become their wives:

> For a while at least, they were able to utilize their position as "women in between" two groups of men to improve their status. Mixed-blood wives anxiously sought to preserve their place within the hierarchy, and if white women emerged as agents of racism, this was largely because they felt forced to protect their social status. In a society where marriage defined a woman's position, white women felt threatened by the presence of acculturated native women against whom they might have to compete for husbands. Investigators of women's history are discovering that the view of women as "active agents," instead of the simplistic view of women as "passive victims," promises to provide the key to understanding women's motivations and actions. (p. 8)

It is probable that Native women, who were used to hard work, were practical in choosing the somewhat easier life offered to them by the traders. Marital unions between traders and Native women heightened women's status within their communities through the roles they assumed as interpreters, language teachers, and guides.

In spite of the differing opinions about whether Indian women were content with White traders, there is general agreement on the key role that Native women played in the fur trade:

> In most other areas of the world, sexual contact between European men and Native women has usually been illicit in nature and essentially peripheral to the white man's trading or colonizing ventures. In the Canadian west, however, alliances with Indian women were the central social aspects of the fur traders' progress across the country. (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 4)

The social and economic role of Native women in the fur trade kept them from simply being objects of sexual exploitation. The fur trade society allowed women an integral socio-economic role because there was little division between the spheres of work and home.

Marriages between Indian women and European men began as social and economic ventures; however, these alliances eventually created a new Nation of people—the Métis:

> They were the pemmican makers and the loyal mates to thousands of white men from Canada, United States and Britain who came out to join the fur trade. An Indian women could be a powerful economic and political asset to a trader, for as Nor'Wester Daniel Harmon reasoned when offered a daughter by a Cree chief, "I was sure that while I had the Daughter I should not only have the Father's hunt but those of his relations also." A number of these "country" marriages (such as Harmon's) survived even when the trader left the fur country, but many were more casual and the North West became populated with native women and their half-breed children who had been abandoned by their men. (Babcock, 1975, p. 58)

Domestic duties were eased somewhat when Native women welcomed the introduction of European technology. This promoted further economic change. The Native woman's easy adaptation to these new technologies may have been influenced by their European husbands' attitudes about women in general:

> Practically to a man, fur-trade writers articulate a view of women as being the fragile, weaker sex dependent upon the chivalrous protection of men. They were appalled by the drudgery and hardship of an Indian woman's lot; the fact that a life of toil and premature old age were the fate of many women in their own country did not seem to intrude upon their consciousness. Particularly shocking to the fur traders was the way in which women in northern and woodland tribes were used as beasts of burden; they were required to carry or haul the accouterments of camp from place to place and fetch home the animals which the hunters had killed. (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 17)

This attitude may have back-fired somewhat when some of the Indian women who had earlier accepted their position in Indian society now enjoyed and exercised their new independence and "wore the breeches." Van Kirk (1980) said that within her own sphere, the Indian wife of the fur trader also enjoyed more autonomy:

> The value of the services which the Indian woman performed in fur-trade society, when coupled with this tradition of being 'mistress in her own house,' appears to have enabled individual women to gain dominant positions. (p. 83)

There was considerable adjustment required between the European traders and their Indian wives with their different views on such things as childbirth and nursing. Van Kirk (1980) discussed the surprise expressed by Europeans such as Hudson's Bay Company man Andrew Graham's observations about childbirth among Indian women:

> I can affirm that women have been taken in travail while on a journey; and they only drop behind the company, bring forth the little stranger, tie it up in a cradle, and carrying it on their backs, proceed as if nothing had happened. (p. 19)

The European men considered Indian women lacking in fertility since their children were spaced two or three years apart, unlike European families. The men encouraged their Indian wives not to nurse the children since they were accustomed to the wealthier classes of European women who employed "wet nurses." Indian mothers, on the other hand, suckled their young for several years. The traders believed that long periods of nursing prevented conception and encouraged premature aging. When the women did shorten the nursing periods of their children, the size of families greatly increased (Van Kirk, 1980, pp. 19-20).

The mixed-blood offspring of the White traders and Indian mothers became an accepted part of fur trade society. There was no longer a need for White traders to continue to intermarry with Indians; the mixed-blood women became more desirable marriage partners:

> The important economic role of the Indian wife reflected the extent to which the traders adopted a native way of life. Nevertheless, fur-trade society was not Indian; rather it combined both European and Indian elements to produce a distinctive, self-perpetuating community. This process was symbolized by the emergence of a large number of mixed-blood children. The replacement of the Indian wife by the mixed-blood wife resulted in a widespread and complex pattern of inter-marriage among fur-trade families. It produced a close-knit society in which family life was highly valued. (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 5)

The influence of the European men extended to many aspects of their families' lives:

> Company men were to take a firm hand in encouraging their families to adopt habits of industry, cleanliness and decency; the mothers' role was to be diminished, as Indian and mixed-blood women were considered to be hopelessly lax disciplinarians and lacking in propriety. (Van Kirk, 1980 p. 132).

Although there were practical reasons for acculturating their daughters the Indian way, many fathers had qualms about "abandoning their children to such a fate. It exposed them to physical hardship and returned them to a primitive, heathen state, a course which offended the religious sensibilities of some officers in both companies" (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 97). As a result, the White traders felt justified in acculturating their Métis offspring to the European lifestyle.

Although the European traders influenced their wives and daughters, the Indian mothers still passed on their native skills which were vital to the trade: "making moccasins, netting snowshoes and preparing pemmican. They were expert needlewomen, and their

skill, in fashioning mittens, caps and leggings, became increasingly useful" (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 110).

Many fur trade fathers believed that it was in their daughters' best interests to acculturate them to "British standards of womanhood." This process of acculturation left many mixed-blood girls "helpless and vulnerable in a society which was becoming increasingly racist and sexist towards native women" (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 7). The White male attitude of both fur trade fathers and missionaries "involved pressing mixed-blood girls into the increasingly passive and dependent mold that was deemed appropriate to the function of women in the nineteenth-century European society" (pp. 152-153).

In spite of this effort, it was through the influence of the Indian mothers teaching their daughters survival skills which ensured that

> a fur trader's daughter possessed the ideal qualifications to be a fur trader's wife. This child of the fur trade was a symbol of the fusion of European and Indian cultures; she knew no other way of life than that of the Indian country. If she was not as hardy as her Indian mother, the mixed-blood woman was still much better able to cope with the not inconsiderable rigours of life at a fur-trade post than a white woman would have been. (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 109)

While the lives of the fur traders and their families were relatively untouched by European standards for the first century, that situation changed drastically in the early to mid 1800s with the advent of the missionaries and the arrival of European women in the Northwest. Van Kirk (1980) described the changes, particularly as they relate to social status and racial distinctions:

> After an absence of over a century, the actual appearance of white women in the Canadian West was to have serious repercussions, particularly upon the fur-trade elite. Their coming underscored the increasing class and racial distinctions which characterized fur-trade society in the nineteenth century. In the Rupert's Land of the 1830s, a genteel British wife was a conspicuous status symbol for a Hudson's Bay Company officer, but, ironically, the white wife also presaged the ultimate decline of the fur trade. Her presence was most visible in the Red River Settlement, where, like the missionary, she symbolized the coming of a settled, agrarian order. This would be a world in which native women would have little role to play. (p. 5)

With the arrival of European women, the Native women were relegated to inferior status, and racism flourished.

Marriage opportunities with White traders were discouraged at every level, whereas marriages with European women were highly sought after. The beginning of a double standard based on strict Victorian morals changed the status of the Indian woman in the fur trade era. Incoming traders chose to ignore the implicit marital obligations practiced as the 'custom of the country,' and increasingly looked upon Native women as objects for sexual gratification, not as wives. It was the Native woman, not the trader,

who was judged immoral because "promiscuous tendencies were supposedly inherent in their Indian blood" (Van Kirk, 1980, p. 146).

In spite of seemingly insurmountable societal pressures imposed upon bicultural families of the fur trade, a strong familial bond was forged. From these ancestral roots, a distinct Métis identity emerged, and descendants of these families maintained the heritage of their ancestors with pride. Métis people who are aware of their roots from oral history are familiar with their ancestors' contributions to the development of the fur trade in Western Canada. They are also cognizant that the roles of their female ancestors were equally vital in the fur trade industry and Métis history. Unfortunately, existing literature has not accurately reflected the significance of their roles. Therefore, historical knowledge needs to be supplemented with our ancestors' stories as told by our elders.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The focus here is on the voices of the individuals interviewed for the Royal commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) study. Because it would have been too large a task to analyze all the interview questions, 40 were selected for the analysis. The questions and a range of their responses are summarized and included under the following headings: Aboriginal Status, Language and Education, Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian Relationships, Leadership, Political Involvement, Decision Making, Adaptation of Women, and Changing Traditions.

I tried to select a wide range of excerpts to correlate with the variation of their responses (included in Appendix A). Part of the explanation for the variance in their responses was because of the age range of the informants. Terminology such as "old days," depending on the informants' age, could be interpreted as anywhere from the turn of the century to the 1930s; whereas others referred to the 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s as the "old days." There were also different perceptions of "community" dependent upon their experiences. Some referred to the broader community of Native and non-Native people; others excluded the non-Native community, given the research topic. Multiple interpretations of the term "leadership" were also noticeably apparent.

Two of the informants in the RCAP study have lived in the Town of Slave Lake between 2 and 4 years, although they lived in the Lesser Slave Lake region for 30 to 40 years. They were raised along the southern shore of the lake in the communities of Faust, High Prairie, and Grouard. Ten informants lived in Slave Lake for 18 to 40 years. Nine lived in the community for 49 to 91 years. I neglected to ask one elderly man in his late 80s the length of time he had lived in town, but it would be safe to estimate that he had lived in the area 40 to 60 years. He said that his family lived in Desmarais, Sucker Creek, Marten River, and on the Sawridge reserve.

I have also included my interpretation and analysis in this section as a researcher. As an Aboriginal person from Lesser Slave Lake, I have "insider" knowledge, albeit limited, since I no longer reside in the community. Regardless, I am still Aboriginal, and I have memories of the community and continue to be connected to it as previously discussed. I have included my perspective partly because the interview has its limitations as a research instrument, and partly as a means to integrate the variation of responses. My input is included in a different font to differentiate it from that of the informants. My words are not to be considered in any way as an "authority" on local Aboriginal history or present-day matters, but as supplemental information only.

Aboriginal Status

It was difficult deciding on how to categorize the Aboriginal status of certain individuals. For example, one of the women identified herself as Indian, but because she did not have Indian status at the time of the interview, I listed her as Métis. She was working towards acquiring Treaty status. Another woman in her 80s identified herself as

Métis, but because she had recently acquired Indian status, I listed her as "C-31." The two individuals who are listed as "Treaties" regained their status after 1985. They were considered Treaty while they were growing up, but because they married non-Treaty men, they lost their Indian status. They are both over 50 and would have been categorized as Métis for most of their adulthood. One of the men identified himself as Métis but stated that he is eligible to acquire Indian Status. I listed him as Métis. See Table 1 for a summary their Aboriginal status, age, gender, and first language.

Table 1

Personal Data (Interviews Conducted June 4 - July 15, 1993)

Interview	Age	Sex	Status	First language
#1.	72	F	Métis	Cree
#2.	58	F	C-31	Engl
#3.	90	F	Métis	Cree
#4.	52	M	Métis*	Cree
#5.	69	F	Métis	Cree
#6.	71	F	Métis	Cree
#7.	63	F	Métis	Cree
#8.	81	F	C-31**	Cree
#9.	82	M	Métis	Cree
#10.	74	F	Métis	Cree
#11.	86	M	Métis	Cree
#12.	75	F	C-31	Cree
#13.	39	F	Métis	Cree
#14.	65	M	Métis	Cree
#15.	45	F	Métis***	Cree
#16.	26	F	Métis	Cree
#17.	57	F	Trty****	Cree
#18.	76	F	Métis	Engl
#19.	55	F	C-31	Cree
#20.	69	F	Métis	Cree
#21.	55	F	Trty****	Engl
#22.	66	M	C-31	Cree

* Self-identified as Métis but is eligible to become Status Indian
** Self-identified as Métis but has C-31 status
*** Self-identified as Treaty Indian but has Métis status
**** Treaty Indian reinstated as a result of Bill C-31.

Language and Education

The participants were asked what their first language was and whether or not their children and grandchildren, if they had any, spoke Cree. In addition, they were asked if their parents spoke Cree or English at home.

Nineteen of the 22 people interviewed said that Cree is their first language. However, the majority of them have not taught their children to speak Cree. Those most likely to speak or understand Cree are the eldest children in the families interviewed (estimated age range from 40 to 70). Most of the informants' grandchildren do not speak Cree, although some of them are learning it at school. At the time the research was undertaken in 1993, the children had the option to take Cree or French classes in school. Because the majority of their parents are not fluent Cree speakers, it might be quite a challenge for their children to become fluent in the Cree language.

Several factors affect parents' decisions not to teach their children the Cree language. In some cases in the past, priests, nuns, and school teachers were agents of culture change. One of the men who is in his 80s said that the priests had a strong influence on his and his wife's decision not to teach their children Cree:

> I was a fool for not talking Cree to them right away. There was a priest who was good friends with us. . . . He told us not to teach them anything in Cree. We sure made a mistake. Now they are madder than hell that they don't know. (Interview #9, Appendix A)

Others who went to the mission (residential school) lost some of their Cree language because they were not allowed to speak it: "I don't speak Cree that well at all. My grandchildren don't speak Cree" (Interview #17, Appendix A). This individual said that both her parents spoke Cree at home. But she was in residential school for many years, so she lost most of her language.

My dad told this story about his first experience in school (S. J. Sinclair, November 1993). He was five years old at the time and could not speak English. The teacher wrote the numbers from 1 to 10 on the blackboard and asked the students if they could read them. My Dad excitedly responded to the numbers with which he was familiar: For number 1, he said it was *cimacikanatik* ('c' is pronounced 'ts' or 'ch' depending on the geographical area the speaker is from) which means "fencepost." For number 6, he said *minos osoy* meaning "cat's tail." And for number 7, he said *cikahikan,* which is "axe." He was sent home from school, and when he arrived home, his mom asked why he was crying. He said that they didn't want him in school. She told him, "Some day, my son, you'll make it and you'll show them." When he learned to speak English and went back to school, he excelled and even skipped some grades.

From a child's perspective, that type of incident would have been traumatic and embarrassing. When children are forbidden to speak their Native language or when they are humiliated or ridiculed in school, they learn that it is unacceptable to speak their language, at least outside of the home. In communities such as Slave Lake, where the influence of White people was becoming more prominent, many Native parents considered it a priority that their children become educated. Learning the Cree language was not considered important.

My parents, like many others in the community, did not make a conscious effort to teach the Cree language to their children. However, they spoke it to each other and to friends and relatives, especially the elderly. They thought that we would "pick it up" because we were around Cree speakers on a fairly regular basis. Our paternal grandmother spoke Cree to us when we were in her care while our parents were away. That is how we learned basic Cree commands. There are several Aboriginal people in Slave Lake of the "baby boomer" generation who, unfortunately, are not fluent Cree speakers.

For the individuals who had to go residential school (commonly referred to as "the mission"), some of them lost much of their language and had to adjust to living away from home at a very young age:

> I was in residential school from age seven to sixteen years—eight years in Grouard, then one year in a girls' dorm. . . . They didn't accept us in public school, and if we didn't go we were forced to go. They could lay charges, yet we couldn't go to school at home. We weren't allowed there. Some of the kids were home until they were seven, then they had to go. (Interview #21, Appendix A)

Nine of the informants went to residential school from 2 to 10 years in duration.

The town of Slave Lake did not have a residential school, so Status Indian children had to go to mainly Grouard or Joussard. The Treaty children had no choice but to go to the mission, but some non-Status Indian and Métis children also were sent there:

> It was mostly Treaty kids that went to the Mission. I guess the parents [of Métis children] paid for the kids to go to school. My mother was a Treaty, so she could put us all in there. (Interview #8, Appendix A)

When students completed school as high as the g[redacted]e offered, they would have to transfer schools yet again. After completing Grade 8 in Grouard, this individual had to move even further north before eventually returning home:

> I went as far as Grade Eight in Grouard, and then we transferred to Peace River from there. Then after Grade Ten the school burned down in Peace River, so I never went back; I stayed home and helped Mom. She had so many kids. We had to wash [clothes] by hand the hard way, and they had cows to milk—lots of work to do. (Interview #1, Appendix A)

Two of the participants had no formal education at all. This gentleman, in his 80s, speaks English quite well but never had the opportunity to go to school:

> No, I never go to school. My wife, I think, go to school. She can talk English pretty good, and she can read. Myself, I can't read, nothing. I never go to school myself. I used to work all the time in my life for White people. That's why I pick up a little for myself—talk English. . . . Just me mostly stay in the bush all the time in my family. My mother all the time stay in the

bush. No chance to go to school. That's bad for me. (Interview 11, Appendix A)

The remaining 11 individuals went to local public schools. For people who did not live right in town, it was very difficult for them to become educated:

> No, and neither did my parents. Nobody ever did. They went to regular school. I don't think they went very much though. Years ago there were hardly any schools, and if there was a school they had to go a long ways, and there was no buses at those times. They had to walk or use horses. (Interview #20, Appendix A)

Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian Relationships

In responding to questions concerning differences in attitudes toward White women and local Native women, the informants' opinions varied. Some said that discrimination existed:

> It seems to me the Whites used to go with the Whites and the Indians among their own. I think there was discrimination. There were separate groups. (Interview #1, Appendix A)

> I guess there was an attitude difference between the Aboriginal people and the White society. When I was going to the schools, we were always looked down on. (Interview #4, Appendix A)

> In some ways it seems the Native women were "put aside." They'd bring in the White women first. In some ways that's what I'd see anyway. (Interview #10, Appendix A)

Other individuals had different experiences and did not think that Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal women were treated or viewed differently:

> It was better years ago. Everybody was the same. There was never any feeling that you were different. (Interview #19, p.2)

> We got along with the White people. I couldn't speak English, but we still got along. (Interview #7, Appendix A)

Another woman said that she did not encounter any racism, but experienced discrimination because of socio-economic disparities:

> As far as I felt, myself, everybody got along. . . . The only discrimination that I really felt and my kids felt, even going to school, was, in those days when you went on welfare you weren't given extra money to buy clothes for yourself. Once or twice a year you were given clothes so everybody

> was able to identify who the kids were that were on welfare because they all had the same jackets or the same boots or whatever, and the kids did get teased for that. But that's more or less being teased for being on welfare, not for being an Indian. Other than that I didn't feel discrimination. I always fit in and I was invited to places where White people were. (Interview #2, Appendix A)

Based on the views of people interviewed and on my own experience, racial discrimination existed in the past and continues in the present, although it often is hidden and more apparent to those who experience it. It may be that Aboriginal people whose Indian ancestry was obvious were more apt to be victims of discrimination. Those with light skin complexions would "blend" in with the non-Native community and therefore may not have observed or experienced the same prejudice as people with dark skin. However, when Aboriginal people deny their Indian ancestry, it is indicative that discrimination is prevalent in the community.

Covert discrimination is often hard to identify, especially for young people. Whether discrimination is covert or overt, it is equally damaging, especially for children. Self-esteem and self-perception are formed during our early childhood years right up through adolescence and often into adulthood. We learn who we are and how we fit into our world by how we are treated at home, but also by the way we are accepted or not accepted in the community by our peers and other adults.

During my early years in Slave Lake, I remember the discrimination that some of my Native school mates experienced. Those who did not live in town had to bring their lunches to school. Some of them were very shy and were embarrassed to eat in front of their classmates. It did not help that they often had to bring bannock or moose meat for lunch. Their clothing may not have been as clean or as new as that of their classmates. These young people were made to feel shame and inferior by their peers, and often their teachers. It is not surprising that many of them suffered from low self-esteem and few completed their education. Although the discrimination these Native students experienced may have been more covert, it was still there. There was always an underlying assumption that the "White way was the right way," and that Native traditions were a part of the past.

When I was in Grade Six our teacher, who was both British and strict, asked the class how often we bathed. He told us to raise our hands if we bathed weekly, every few days, or every day. Slave Lake did not have full indoor plumbing until the early 1960s, so for many, daily bathing would have been an insurmountable task, especially because many of the families were so large. I felt some shame that I was among those who did not raise their hands to show we bathed every day, but I also remember feeling that it was wrong for him to ask us that question to begin with. As an adult, I often wondered, if it had been a classroom of all White kids, would he have asked the question at all? Or did he have preconceived ideas about the personal hygiene of Native people?

As an Aboriginal person, I am not alone in my experiences with overt and covert forms of discrimination by White people. I have a stronger sense of identity and self-assurance as an adult. But in my early adolescent years I was very vulnerable to jeering White kids calling me a "squaw" or telling me that I was dirty because my skin was darker than theirs. Regardless of the form of discrimination, the effects are negative and very damaging.

People with "mixed-blood" are often discriminated against not only by White people, but by Indian people as well. They are perceived by some as "marginal" people

between two cultures, not fully accepted by either culture. Some Elders, however, say that "Mixed-Bloods" have a role to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and White cultures because of being part of both. Building bridges is not to deny that racism exists, but rather to acknowledge its existence and to help create understanding between cultures. Gaps are not bridged when one culture prospers at the expense of the other; both should have equal opportunity to succeed.

Leadership

Approximately 10 questions related to leadership were asked of most informants given the nature of the study. As previously stated, there was some variance in the responses because of several factors. Some of the individuals were not raised in the town of Slave Lake. Others moved back and forth to nearby reserves and neighbouring communities. Another obvious explanation is that there is an age spread of 64 years between the eldest and youngest informant, so their perceptions would naturally differ significantly.

Some informants considered White men in the community to be the leaders or spokespersons during the early years in Slave Lake. At that time, Native people were excluded or at least not invited to public meetings:

> Different men—White men. Old Schurter used to be a leader. And some women, Mrs. Schurter and different women too. They'd form like a council. That used to be in "Old Town" here. They [the leaders] were mostly all White people, because our people were not too well educated and they figured that it's not for us, and they didn't invite us anyway. And they [Native people] didn't speak too much English, so how were they going to cope in the White man's area? (Interview #1, Appendix A)

Another informant said that the White men usually were the leaders in the dominant society. But in the Native community her father was one of the leaders:

> They had someone who spoke for the community. It was always the dominant society that dictated to us, to the Native people as to what was happening. They were generally White, but my father was one of the Native leaders. He told them what he felt. (Interview #15, Appendix A)

Others said that there were no community leaders: "In my time, people pretty well went the way they wanted to go" (Interview #14, Appendix A). One of the women said that there were no overall leaders, but that there were community leaders and heads of families who were usually men. She went on to say that the women were the "hidden leaders" who advised the men:

> Everybody was a leader, but there was a lot of hidden leaders, women especially, their inner strengths. . . . They were strong but not up-front. . . . There were no overall leaders. There were community leaders and heads of families. The mother was the hidden leader who gave advice to the man who was the leader. My mother was the centre of the circle in our family. . . . There was a chief on the reserve [west of Slave Lake], but I don't remember too much about him. . . . I can't remember leadership really being strong [in Slave Lake] until the Métis Association came up. . . . But leadership then was very hidden, not right out front like it is now—it's too out front. (Interview #17, Appendix A)

Some individuals regarded the elders to be leaders in the community:

> Oh yes, they were there. The elders that we talked about earlier [in the interview], those were the people who were looked upon when there was a difficult situation whether it was sickness, lack of jobs. . . . They were the ones people went to, to try and find a way to solve what was affecting the community. They would almost be like what we have now as the Chamber of Commerce, business leaders who make decisions to help the community. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

Others specified Native leaders involved in community affairs:

> Oh yes, in our family there was my brother, Sam. He was "up there" in the community development field. He was a go-getter. Some people looked towards him for leadership. And then later on in a different time, decade, my brother Henry was looked upon as a leader. . . . Ferman L'Hirondelle at one time was a spokesman in the community. He was well-respected and honest. (Interview #19, Appendix A)

When asked if Native people, male or female, were leaders, many responded that the Métis were independent and made their own decisions:

> Halfbreeds were more or less on their own—neutral. . . . No one was bossing them; you lived like everybody else. Your neighbour could be White or anybody. [Translation] (Interview #3, Appendix A)

> We really didn't need leaders. We were all about the same. It depends on what we were doing, but some did more than others. I guess those ones could be considered leaders. Mostly things were done in a community effort. (Interview #19, Appendix A)

One of the men said that the Métis did not really have their own leaders, but that they would go to their elders if they required assistance in making a decision. He also said that women played a role in all the activities:

> Not really amongst the Natives themselves. The "Treaties" had leaders who, you know, are chiefs. But with the Métis, naturally there was the Métis Association way back, but there was none here. [But people would go for advice or counselling.] If they'd run into a problem, they'd gather and say, "Maybe we should go and see him; he'd know better." They would go and see an elder, more or less, sometimes relations like your grandfather or your uncle. You would go for advice if you weren't sure of something. They also went to women. Women played quite a role in all activities in my time. (Interview #14, Appendix A)

Another male said that women had a strong influence in the Native community:

> Women, I would say, were the strongest in the Native communities when there was a crisis, but they would bring their men in when they were needed. But usually the woman called the shots. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

Some informants said that in the past a good male leader had to be a good hunter and a good spokesman:

> My dad was a real good hunter, and he was the lead one. . . . It was because he was a good hunter. He used to talk for the other people. He started the Métis organization [in the area]. He went to see Peter Tomkins. He would ride a horse and travel around organizing people. This was a long time ago; I was about 11 years old. (Interview #6, Appendix A)

In addition to being a good provider, a respected leader shared his knowledge with the people and cared about their well-being:

> If he is good, the people will like you. He is everybody's friend. . . . That's a good leader. . . . The good people, they'll tell you what is supposed to be good, . . .what to do for hunting—mostly hunting at that time; there was not much work. (Interview #11, Appendix A)

Good leaders were considered to be those who had good "people skills" and could motivate people. They knew how to be diplomatic, but at the same time they would address the issue at hand:

> I think humour had a lot to do with accepted leadership. People who knew how to make others laugh was considered a good community leader in a way because besides making people laugh, he'd make some statement that relates to a bit of a crisis, like maybe lack of food. He'd make a joke out of it, but he'd also do something about it too. He'd say, "*taskoc* [pronounced tahskohts] *kapowin kitim'naw*," which means, "We'll throw away our laziness." "*Mahti kamacanaw*" [pronounced kahmahtsahnaw] means, "We'll go hunting." Some of the people in that group might not be hunters

but they'd say, "I'll go along and look after the horses while you guys hunt." It would be like a team. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

One of the younger informants described a good male leader as one who was concerned about the people at the community level. He also would have to be able to endure political pressure and stand up for the rights of the people:

> He'd have to be strong, a "grass roots" leader, where the decisions come from bottom up, not top down. He has to be somebody who's been there, who knows where the people have come from and what their concerns are, and somebody who knows he's got rights and can stand up for them and is not willing to back down because of political pressure. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

The characteristics of a good female leader were not unlike those of a good male leader. They had to have courage, compassion, and the ability to counsel or give advice to those who asked for it:

> Female leaders would be the same [as the male leaders]. They wouldn't be scared to challenge or to talk to anybody. If you needed advice, even now if you need advice, you usually ask a woman leader who you would go to for counselling, Native counselling. Before this [Native] counselling service, they would probably go to people they had confidence in to help them. There was always somebody you could go to, especially within the family, and get support from each other. (Interview #21, Appendix A)

Whereas the male leaders had to have good hunting skills, the women had to be good at doing beadwork and making moccasins and other leather goods:

> They were the leaders, Mrs. Twin and my mom—they knew how to make moccasins and everything. Mrs. Twin did the beadwork, and my mom sewed the moccasins. They used to sell them at $10 a pair then. (Interview #6, Appendix A)

Women who were good seamstresses were respected, but also those who were religious and extended their hospitality to the less fortunate were considered good leaders:

> People [women] who could sew well were considered good leaders within a community; people who could make good moccasins, good beaders; ones who could make good dry meat were at the top. Church-goers showed good leadership. They'd invite people and feed them after [church]; things that pulled the community together. A lot of women did that. It was kind of a way of life. People would come out of church and say, "*nikanahk 'petotet*" which means "Come to our place." And they maybe already prepared some special food they were going to feed people. People who were poor very seldom invited anybody because they couldn't afford to

> feed people, but they would get invited some place. At one time it gave people pride to be able to help other families get that extra meal. It was considered almost like bailing someone out of jail. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

When the husbands were away hunting, trapping, or working out of town, the women helped to support the family by selling their leather goods. The eldest participant was one of these women, as described by her daughter: "She made beadwork and all kinds of things, mukluks, moccasins, jackets. She would sell them to provide for the family" (Interview #3, Appendix A). She excels in sewing and had recently made a dress and a hat for her great-granddaughter's wedding even though she is in her 90s.

When asked how leaders or spokespersons were chosen, some informants interpreted the question to include the broader community:

> I guess they were elected when they formed little meetings. . . . But the Native people were never invited . . . . The White people used to haul the Native people all over to take them to town to vote and tell them where to put their "x." . . . That's how they cheated. (Interview #1, Appendix A)

The reserves had chiefs or councillors, whereas small communities such as Slave Lake had individuals to whom people went for leadership. These individuals were knowledgeable and shared their knowledge with the community:

> There were always leaders who would help you and direct you with where you wanted to go. I think people who had the knowledge were chosen. If they went out in the world for awhile and they learned different skills that a lot of people in the community didn't have, they would bring back that knowledge, by working in the community. They weren't as isolated and they gathered knowledge, . . .and they'd come back with it. (Interview #21, Appendix A)

Leaders or spokespersons were respected and well-known members of the community whose actions were exemplary for others to follow:

> I think it was by their actions. In a small community, if you watch the actions of people, when there's a need somewhere, the person will go to someone they most respect who can help them out. There's almost a steady path to those elders who can be of value in dealing with the crisis at hand. Those kind of leaders did not come and go. When people got to be respected elders, they learned over a period of time. . . . If somebody came from a different community who was known to be a good hunter or a good leader of some sort, he was well-known. When he arrived in the community, he was almost welcomed like he was a champion. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

Political Involvement

When asked if Native women attended community meetings, some said that it was not common in the past except for the White women. It was not until about the 1970s that local Aboriginal women became involved in community activities. Most of the informants said that they participate in mainstream politics by voting in elections.

The term "self-government" was interpreted differently by informants. Some said that they did not understand what it meant. Most of them said that it would allow Aboriginal people to have more control over their lives and their communities. There was some concern expressed about ongoing financial support for self-government initiatives. Others were concerned about favouritism and nepotism practiced by Aboriginal leadership. This male informant spoke of his perception of its importance:

> I see it as having a very important heading. It's important to me because we need people to show some leadership—what self-government can do if people would just dig their heels in and participate in a manner as if you were elected in government. It's being willing to make sound decisions in cooperation with government, initially, with the understanding that with self-government all the decisions will be made by Aboriginal people and to negotiate for funds to properly administer those decisions. I think it's a God-given right for Aboriginal people to be allowed resources to carry on with self-government—because the monies that have been expended, and a lot of it wasted amongst Aboriginal people, is there already. It just has to be pursued in a manner where you have better accountability and better access to future funding by negotiating with the top levels of both governments. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

This same individual intimated that some government arrangements operate under the guise of self-government initiatives but, in reality, serve to weaken, rather than enhance, traditional values:

> I think some of the more knowledgeable types and those who are willing to learn have to rely on some of the good things that were used in the past and bring them back and see if they can be used in the same manner—like respect and sound decision making that seems to be lacking in a lot of communities now. . . . It can be valued by the young people if they are willing to listen to the old knowledge that's still out there. And to ask questions of the older people to help them with things they're lacking; they don't ask enough questions. One dangerous part of this self-government thing is that people in some areas are in more of a dictatorship role, which would weaken the traditional values that could be used rather than to push people around and expect them to respond in a manner that would be effective. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

Several individuals had some apprehension about whether or not self-government would change things in the community for women. Some expressed the need for

Aboriginal women to maintain their own organizational structure to ensure that they have a political voice:

> I don't know if it would change anything for women. I think women would need to have their own women's council . . . for us to have change. I think we might be recognized now because I know women are important in Native society, but I don't know how much of that recognition would mean change. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

> I don't think it will change things for women. Somehow the women get their voices in, but the men aren't listening anyway. They are still talking about the same issues they were talking about a few years ago, Native women and Bill C-31. When the Royal Commission came around the first time, that was a few years back, and they are still talking about the same thing—nothing has changed. So when is the Royal Commission or any of those guys going to start making changes for the Native peoples and women? If Natives were all strong together that would be good, because they need to know that we are out here. (Interview #15, Appendix A)

Decision Making

The variance in the responses about women and decision making in daily life indicate different interpretations of the term "decision making." For some it meant decisions that were discussed in the home: "There was no such thing as decision making. I never heard anybody say anything about religion at home. My grandmother used to tell us to get ready for church, and we'd go" (Interview #5, Appendix A). Others perceived the decision-making process to be somewhat hidden—the roles of the parents were either not clear to the children, or the decisions related to daily life were shared by both parents:

> I think they were involved; all those things went into the family unit. They just became part of that. There wasn't much leadership. Well, there was, but it was so hidden. It was done in a different way. There were no radicals—people hollering, demanding—you never saw that long time ago. Everybody listened to each other. (Interview #17, Appendix A)

Almost half of the participants interviewed attended residential school and were absent from their homes anywhere from 2 to 10 years. Their childhood memories of family life were during their early years up to about seven, during the summer holidays if they were able to come home, and during late adolescence. Some of the women returned home from the mission at the age of about 16. Within a few years they left the home of their parents to get married and start their own families. Some had only minimal parental care while they were in residential schools, so it was difficult for them to know how to be parents:

> Some of us like me didn't know how to raise a family because the family unit was broken down. Everyone is trying to get over this, as the family unit in itself isn't strong, as it was torn apart. . . . I was taught strictness and structure. At home, there was none of that; there was a lot of love. At residential school, they taught us that loving somebody or hugging somebody is wrong. (Interview #17, Appendix A)

Some informants were very clear about the roles of men and women. However, they may not have regularly observed their parents discussing certain topics due to the absence of the father:

> They [women] made the decisions, in my family anyway. I think my mother demanded things rather than talking about it. Food gathering was my dad's [role], but the rest was all my mom's, probably because Dad was gone most of the time. Religion was never discussed. They were both Catholics, and so there was no argument about that. (Interview #13, Appendix A)

Others perceived gender roles to be quite distinct and that men had more say than women: "Most of the decisions were made by the men, but the women made some decisions too. The women made sure the kids went to school and to church" (Interview #12, Appendix A). "My dad got the last say in anything, but most of the time my mother was on her own to look after all of us" (Interview #2, informant's daughter, Appendix A).

Some considered women's roles explicit within the family unit with the lead role in decision making:

> Anything that was done in the house was my grandma Sarah's decision. . . . She had quite a say because she stood for what she believed in. He couldn't walk all over her or make her submissive. She believed in what she believed in, and there was no other way about it. . . . She was the religious one. She was the one who decided when they went to church . . .and any religious events that were happening. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

Women like my grandmother were perceived to be strong decision makers, particularly in the household, as stated by my aunts and, below, by my father:

> She was the one who did make the decisions, in the household mostly. The men long ago thought the mother was the one who was supposed to do all that—and sometimes yet [today]. (Interview #1, Appendix A)

> She made all the decisions pretty well. We knew our dad was busy. He was the hunter, the trapper. He was the one who made the money, so we knew the mother did the rest. When the money would come in, Mom disbursed it. . . . She was a "go-getter." (Interview #19, Appendix A)

> My mother had no trouble making decisions. I don't know if it was because my dad didn't interfere too much. She was always the boss around the house. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

Others also viewed their mothers as the decision makers in the household:

> In our home, my mother pretty well had all the say in the house. I would think maybe Dad and Mom discussed a lot of things that we don't know anything about. But to us, Mom made all the decisions. (Interview #14, Appendix A)

Many women made the decisions in their homes, but their authority did not necessarily extend into the community:

> [She did not make decisions in the community] unless somebody had come for help. There was no community organizations at the time we were being raised. Everybody had their own free go at whatever was going on, whatever gatherings there was. With baseball games, they were organized more or less by the White community; later on the Métis participated. (Interview #14, Appendix A)

Although their voices may not have been heard beyond the parameters of their households, they used whatever means they had available to keep informed of issues and events in the community. My aunt described how her mother kept abreast of community matters: "She'd send us big girls out to go listen if there was a meeting and come home and tell her what it was about" (Interview #1, Appendix A). My father talked of assuming that role when he was old enough. Attending community meetings at a young age and listening to Native politicians discuss issues and concerns of the Métis was a catalyst in developing his own political aspirations.

Today Aboriginal women are perceived as being more active in making decisions in their families *and* in the community, according to these responses:

> You've got young people now in politics, with the law, young women school teachers. They're really getting involved and they know what's happening out there—and they voice their opinions. (Interview #2, Appendix A)

> I was lucky that my grandma was a good role model for me. I notice that we have a lot more role models for women to follow, so that makes a big impact. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

> There are a lot of women even in these [local] agencies who are employed, so they have the knowledge. I think a lot of times you can just share your past experience with a lot of these things that are going on, so people can relate. (Interview #21, Appendix A)

When questioned about men's authority in the family and community, the responses indicated that the male role was perceived to be outside of the household:

> Men were involved with anything outside the house, and women inside the house. The men used to go out [in the community] if they were asked, to do things like haul wood for people. People would come to ask. (Interview #7, Appendix A)

> I don't think they had that much [authority] in the family, maybe more in the community. . . . Today the men are more involved in the family life than they were years ago. They help with the upbringing of the kids. (Interview #13, Appendix A)

> They had lots of it [authority]. I think they ran the community. . . . In the family, they didn't have very much there. Women were strong in the house. . . . In spite of the alcohol and abuse, they still had their say. When they spoke, their men jumped. (Interview #15, Appendix A)

The perception of men having the ultimate authority has changed today as women are more actively involved in the workforce and in the community, as stated by this individual:

> Years ago, even when I was married, it was a tradition that men were supposed to be the head of the household. I think that was mainly because the woman always stayed home to look after the children. . . . I think because the women are getting out more, doing things more, we're starting to see more equality. They have a lot more authority than they used to. (Interview #21, Appendix A)

The perception of predominant male authority varied depending on the family or household. It is, however, a commonly held point of view that today women have more authority than their mothers' generation did:

> [The men had] quite a bit authority. It was up to them to take the leadership if they wanted to. Some of them left the responsibility with their wives for most of the time. Where I come from anyway, most of the leadership, it seemed, was amongst the Native women. [Today] . . . my wife and I share responsibility, especially in the family. We jointly make decisions relating to the family. . . . I see that as a value in raising families, that you both have to be willing to make decisions. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

Women's roles in decision making were primarily in the household. In more recent times this has changed to include involvement in community decision making.

Adaptation of Women

The "oil boom" in the early 1960s had a major impact on conditions in the community. There was an influx of White people into the community, most of whom were men working on the oil rigs. Alcohol abuse became more prevalent in the area during the early 1960s. Several informants acknowledged the negative impacts of massive oil development in the community:

> They went wild. I think that's when they really started drinking. (Interview #5, Appendix A)

> [The alcohol abuse] really started in the '60s. It was quiet before the "oil boom." Then the kids started drinking. It was everybody who was drinking. It was the parents who drank, and they would leave the kids with someone. (Interview #6, Appendix A)

In addition to alcohol abuse, there was an increase in community violence:

> I think the community didn't adjust very well. There was a lot of fighting going on. All these people came in, and people started to drink a lot. It was Native and non-Native. But a lot of the fights were started by the [White] people who were coming into town. They were invading the town, and the town people didn't really appreciate what they were doing, as it seemed like they just came in and tried to take over. They were without respect. (Interview #21, Appendix A)

For the oil companies, some local businessmen in the oilfield industry, and the Sawridge Band, the "oil boom" was an opportunity for financial prosperity. The majority of the Aboriginal people were not as fortunate. The discovery of oil in the area changed the nature of the community in a significant way, much of it to the detriment of the families and community:

> Some of us adjusted the best way we knew how. We thought we were doing well, but we saw later how alcohol slowly moved into families, including my own, because there was more liquor available, brought in with the liquor store and additional bars. People's families were turned around. And with the new oil activities it brought in new young people [men] who mixed in with the young women in the local area. Even though some of them gained financially, it was destructive in the long run with families, and I think it's still hurting now. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

For many women, alcohol abuse was the start of years of spousal abuse and family violence. Options available for women being abused were almost nil:

> You just had to take it. I wasn't the only one suffering; my kids did too. They suffered just as much as I did. He'd come home any time of the night—three, four o'clock. Everybody would have to get up. He'd start

> fighting us after that. I'd be thrown out at night. Then I'd have to go sleep out in the bush across the creek in the jackpines. I had a dog that used to go with me, just in my nightgown. I'd stay there all night and come home in the daytime. That was an awful life. (Interview #20, Appendix A)

These two individuals spoke of their mother having to contend with alcohol and spousal abuse as follows:

> Sometimes she'd just vanish away. She wouldn't stick around when there was drinking and fighting. . . . [Women] would go to another household until that man was quiet and then come back when he was sleeping or sober. (Interview #1, Appendix A)

> It was very difficult. They just kept it at home. They stayed because they had nowhere to go—or some of them joined their spouses drinking. (Interview #19, Appendix A)

This individual asserted that for many women, alcohol abuse and beatings became an accepted way of life:

> Alcoholism and spousal abuse in those days was an accepted factor. They didn't know that alcoholism was a disease and spousal abuse was something that was not meant to be. At one point, my mother told me that if you get a beating, you were more loved by them. Several of them said that. They just let it be as if nothing had happened. The woman can sit there and say to the man, "You used to beat me." And he would sit there and shake his head and say, "Yeah, I did." But he would never admit that was wrong. It was accepted. (Interview #15, Appendix A)

Unfortunately, some women are still in abusive relationships today, even though there are more choices available to them than were available to their mothers. It is encouraging, however, to know that young Aboriginal women are more aware of their rights and have gained a sense of empowerment:

> I have a lot more rights, and I'm more aware of my rights. And I know that if I want to leave my husband, I have some education; I have something to fall back on. But I also don't have the support of the extended family that they did, so I have different kinds of support than they did. I can be a lot more independent too because of my education and because of my work—where I don't think back then there was very much work, especially in Wabasca. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

It is also promising to know that in spite of the hardships and abuse that many of the female informants endured, they have gained a strong sense of self and independence today. The mothers of these women would not have had the same opportunities:

> I'm still working [outside of the home]. . . . I have a lot of responsibilities now at my age that I don't think my mom ever did. And I think my mom leaned a lot on her man. I think I changed where I became independent, and when I did lose him it wasn't a real dramatic thing for me, as I had a lot of the responsibilities anyway. My mom leaned on my dad and my step-dad; he made a lot of the decisions. With the extended family, my mom was always there, and I don't think I was always there as I'm busy working myself. They can't just say, "You can go and stay at Grandma's," because maybe Grandma's not home. I won't let them expect me to be there, as I work all week and I enjoy my time off too. (Interview #21, Appendix A)

Most of the informants felt that things are generally better now than they were for women of the previous generation:

> Life is easier now. You have everything. You have running water. I know I had to do a lot of water fetching. The work load is easier now. Even raising a family is easier now. Like, I know my granny never worked [outside of the home], and my mother never worked all the time, but still they were always busy doing things. The only money my mother got when she wasn't working was when she was sewing. She had to do all her canning and the whole process just to get a little money. There are less worries now. I think now both the spouses work all day; before, just one would go out. (Interview #13, Appendix A)

One of the individuals who is in her 70s preferred the roles of women and families when she was young compared with those of today:

> They used to help the other people. You have to pay them to help you now. . . . Years ago there was none of this money. We all helped each other and paid each other back with different favours. You would sew some clothes for somebody, and they would cut some ribs for you for nothing. It was trading. . . . Nowadays, they do everything. They take drugs and drink—all sorts of bad things. There is no family unity any more. They have lost that. A lot of people drink with their kids, and that is not good. Years ago we had a lot of discipline. But now if you tell them something, they just turn around and swear at you. (Interview #6, Appendix A)

Another female informant expressed fond memories, not of her mother's generation, but of her grandmother's way of life before alcohol affected the families and communities so drastically:

> I really cherish the way my grandmother used to live across the lake. They were isolated from everything, but they had everything they needed. There was no alcohol then. (Interview #15, Appendix A)

Many women and their families in the community of Lesser Slave Lake were negatively affected by changes that came about in the 1960s, such as alcohol abuse and spousal abuse. But today women feel more empowered than our mothers' or grandmothers' generations for several reasons. There are more opportunities available to women today than there were in the past. Women have achieved higher levels of education and better-paying jobs. Many are self-supporting and have varying degrees of independence. Some of us have the security of knowing that we can survive on our own. We also are aware that we do not have to accept the abuse that we, our mothers, or grandmothers may have endured. Today there are services and opportunities available in most communities to assist in our paths of healing and empowerment.

Changing Traditions

In this section several questions were asked about how Aboriginal women did things differently than those of their mothers' generation; about the value of traditional knowledge; about whether or not women presently have as much or more power and ability to make changes in the community than their mothers' or grandmothers' generations did; about issues with which families are faced today; and in what ways women currently are important in the everyday life of their community.

Through the process of enculturation, cultural traditions inevitably take on different forms between generations. The youngest informant, who was raised by her grandmother, discussed similarities and differences in how they did things:

> I see similarities with the way my grandma raised me because a lot of that I carried on. Like, I am "giving"; if there's one thing that I think about my grandma, it's her "giving" nature. . . . She was quite vocal in the home, and I think I am too. . . . But she was more traditional than I am. . . . And sex was a big secret, something you had to hide. It wasn't something that was a part of life, and the same with menstruation. I was quite young when she died, so I don't know if she would have eventually talked to me about it and explained [it]. . . . She was happy to do things at home and happy to have her husband come home, where I am happy to be productive outside of the home. And I have more friends out in the community, and all my activities are outside of the home, where she was sewing or baking or doing laundry in the home. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

The participants were in agreement that traditional knowledge is undervalued, but that there are different perceptions about what is considered traditional:

> A lot of government societies don't understand what the traditional knowledge is; . . . they think it's a religious thing. In their viewpoint and from my experience, it isn't religious; it's the cultural being of who we are. . . . Religions only deal with limited areas. (Interview #15, Appendix A)

This individual discussed her experience in teaching about traditional knowledge but also said that we are experiencing a time of confusion:

> It's so mixed up right now. I just did a workshop with the RCMP. . . . They couldn't say enough good things about it. . . . [With some people] . . . there's a lot of fear. . . . [Traditional knowledge can be valued more than it is now if] . . . .you just work like we're working. You can only go where you are wanted. If somebody comes and asks you, then they'll open their door for you, but otherwise you can't go start preaching. It doesn't work [that way]. You have to work slowly. It's a very slow process. . . . It's something you don't tell people to do; they have to make up their own minds. You just have to be yourself, and some come slowly. It's coming (Interview #17, Appendix A)

The youngest participant discussed her lack of knowledge about traditional ways and the importance of showing its value in the home and in society:

> I don't think you can value something you don't know. So if I don't do it, does that mean I'm not valuing it? Because I was never taught traditional things. We lived kind of a semi-traditional lifestyle until I was ten, and then from then on it was in a White society and in their world, and I had to fit in. So now when it's my choice in what I can do, if I want to be traditional or not traditional, I don't even know if I'd fit in. . . . It [traditional knowledge] can be valued more so if it's taught. . . . from the home. . . . It's something that's got to be lived and taught. Also society has to value it, because all society's opinions and attitudes reflect down on us, and a lot of times it changes your mind or steers your mind. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

The value of traditional knowledge and the role of young and old people in exchanging such knowledge was considered important by the participants.

Another common view expressed was that Aboriginal women today are perceived to have as much or more power to make changes in the community than their mothers did: "I think so; they are more outspoken than my mother. It is good, as in my day men had more power" (Interview #8, Appendix A). "I think so. . . . They go to school and get the education; they understand" (Interview #10, Appendix A). The youngest informant confirmed that she has more power to effect change in the community than did her grandmother who raised her:

> I think I have more power, and I say that because there's a lot more committees and things that I can be involved in, where she was limited. She was only heard in her circle of friends. And she didn't have the means to go beyond that, . . . where now, we know exactly who to call and who to complain to if we have a problem. If we want change, we know how to get it. . . . Years ago, they'd call on somebody who was White, who was accepted [by Native people], somebody who would know what to do. If my grandfather had something he needed to talk to somebody about, there was a White guy in the community who had been there for quite awhile

that he'd go and see. I remember other guys going to see him too. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

Some of the influences that were seen to improve the situation of young Aboriginal women today include the availability of community resources, higher education, and better job opportunities:

> There's a lot more resources in the community, a lot more jobs, . . . a lot more stability. I know how education is really valued now, where back then it wasn't. Nowadays you have to have a degree, and you have to have your Grade Twelve to get anywhere. And back then it was hard work that got you somewhere. And I think a lot of people don't realize that and don't encourage school. . . . I think we have a lot more influences from White people and TV. Mass media really influences the younger kids. They want what they can't have. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

Having female role models as "trail blazers" also has contributed to the empowerment of the younger generation:

> They have seen others like even me and maybe other Native people working at things and seeing results. . . . Like, even years ago when they were going to start this one housing program, . . . we had to fight for it because the town wasn't really accepting it. They said it would be another welfare ghetto. . . . We really had to convince them that we were trying to help the people. . . . Some of them were living in low rental, and they needed to go a step further to be able to buy their homes. . . . We got the housing, and a lot of people did buy our houses. We really had to fight, and I think kids seeing that, seeing their moms getting that result, was a good role model. (Interview #21, Appendix A)

Most people discussed the positive changes that have occurred for Aboriginal women today. However, there was concern about the need to look back to our grandparents' generation to draw on the strength of their ways:

> I think they have to go back to the grandparents' generation in order to have a strong unit today. Natives have to help themselves. That's where it's at. Even if you have the best education, BSWs, if you don't work from the heart and caring and working with love, then you can't give them nothing. Our young teenagers are starving for love and attention, being that the whole system has changed. Mothers are working; they're never home. And if we don't nourish the kids, they're in trouble because they go looking for it in a different way. (Interview #17, Appendix A)

It seems to be well recognized that Aboriginal women in the community are actively involved in the workforce. However, concern was expressed about the breakdown of the close family units that were commonplace in the past:

> I see a lot of our Native women working for governments and establishments relating to government, and . . . I think they do quite well in the workforce. But on the other hand, I see a weakness in the family tradition of close-knit families with more decisions that relate to discipline, to job possibilities. Everything in general is not as close knit as it used to be. (Interview #22, Appendix A)

Some of the issues with which families in the Lesser Slave Lake region are faced today were identified as racism, alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, and family violence. One individual addressed the physical violence that exists in families who are caught in the web of alcohol and drug abuse as follows:

> A lot of the Native women are faced with a lot of the same issues in the surrounding areas. As they are involved with alcoholism and drugs, they still put up with all of those things—abuse—some of them from their own kids. They [the kids] beat them up. . . . I think the issues are still around, especially physical abuse. It is quite accepted, and they don't want to talk about it. (Interview #15, Appendix A)

Several problems contribute to the breakdown of the family unit:

> Dysfunctionalism like alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, single-parent families, low-income families—all those things contribute to poor family relations, the breakdown in the family. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

Parents are also not providing the guidance and support that children need, as well as discipline:

> Abuse and lack of parental guidance—the children are not listening to their parents. They are rude to them. These kids are growing up so fast. They're teenagers at nine, ten, eleven. (Interview #19, Appendix A)

Adolescents act out the dysfunction of their environment, whether it is their families or their communities. They also have to contend with peer pressure and the high rate of alcohol and drug abuse among their generation:

> I think they have changed for the positive and sometimes for the negative. I think for the positive, families are realizing the dysfunctionalism and are trying to do something about it. And for the negative part, there's a lot more happening now to younger kids like peer pressure, drug abuse and teen pregnancies—things that kids don't know how to handle and are being forced to. (Interview #16, Appendix A)

In addition to alcohol and drug abuse and family violence, Aboriginal families are experiencing intergenerational communication breakdown:

> Communication from the younger generation to the older generations—we need this so much. They don't understand each other. All three generations need to come together. It is our generation that is doing the work between them, trying to heal them and building the bridge. . . . I think [Native families] are beginning to accept the Native culture. A lot of them who are following that road and have sobered up have found it very powerful. I think we need more of that. . . . The older generation who started drinking have stopped and the younger generation have only just started—seeing the older ones. And then there is our generation in the middle who decide to avoid it. With me, teaching my grandchildren the cultural ways: If you follow them one hundred per cent, you don't need all these other influences, like drugs and alcohol. You find your well-being in yourself. (Interview #15, Appendix A)

Today women are seen to be more involved in the community than they were in the past. In previous years their roles were largely in the home. They were caregivers for their families—their children, husbands, elderly relatives, and the sick. Their involvement in the community was minimal, although their roles were important as midwives and sometimes healers. One elderly male participant described such changes:

> They know how to talk now, not like years ago. You've got to have education. [In the old days] some of the women were very important. Like my aunt, no matter what time of the night or morning, if she heard someone was going to have a baby, she'd be right there. It's not only that; she'd make her own roots and stuff. (Interview #9, Appendix A)

Aboriginal women are becoming better educated and are more actively involved in the workforce. Their employment in both public and private sectors, such as local government departments and retail and service industries, and generally as decision makers, is described here:

> A lot of them are employed in the agencies, like housing, social services, child welfare, and in the stores or anywhere. (Interview #21, Appendix A)

> In Slave Lake here, they're doing a lot of the decision making. They're up front though, (Interview #17, Appendix A)

Although many Aboriginal women are involved in the community, they are still seen as the main caregivers and nurturers of the family: "They are the givers of life. . . . I just think of 'Mother Earth' as woman. They are the nurturers and the ones that you go home to" (Interview #16, Appendix A). Many participants consider women the "heart" of the family unit:

> A mother is the centre of the whole family. I don't think that is ever going to change. We're supposed to be the heart of the family. . . . [In the past] a woman was the heart of the family in the home, but on the outside she'd

> say [to her husband], "Well, you are the breadwinner, so you be the spokesman." Actually, I think they were sharing in the inside, but the men maybe were the spokesmen. But women definitely played a part—they had to. Even today women can play a part. (Interview #19, Appendix A)

Aboriginal women are continually attaining positions of leadership in Aboriginal communities and in local, provincial, and federal politics in mainstream society. The following male informant perceived Aboriginal women as good decision makers both in the family and in the political realm:

> I think women are important in making quicker decisions in dealing with family problems. I think when the younger generation get in trouble, women have quicker reactions to deal with them, and they're the first ones who will mention . . . what has to be done. . . . I think men have a tendency to wait too long and almost have to wait until somebody's injured before they do something about things. I see women playing a valuable role there. I also think there's a trend right now from the top in politics in the last five years both federally and provincially where women seem to be valued for their leadership qualities, and I think that is good. Going back to the tradition of Native people in communities, the most powerful leaders in those days were the women because they weren't afraid to make a decision, . . . and they were right about what they stood up for, (Interview #22, Appendix A)

In general, Aboriginal women today, are considered to be important in the everyday life of both their families and communities. Some women perceived their mothers as not having much power in the home or community, but thought that their grandmothers did. Today the empowerment of Aboriginal women is viewed as coming full circle:

> I think in all ways; you have to be involved in all the issues. . . . I think today as Native women in the community, more and more of us are getting educated and . . . are becoming the leaders of other Native people who are not educated. . . . We are going to be the stronghold of our communities. It is coming to a full circle for Native women. (Interview #15, Appendix A)

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Based on the research for this study and on personal observations and experience, I have gained a better sense of the role of Métis Cree women in the Slave Lake area. Although this is not an exhaustive study, it provides an understanding based on the perspectives of the northern indigenous people about the strength of character of the women and of their ancestors.

Among the generation of indigenous people born around the turn of the century, the men had a more visible sort of symbolic power in the community. Women's power was less visible and was more within the privacy of their homes. Their roles in decision making were primarily within large extended family units, which were fundamental to the community social structure. Women worked in their homes raising and feeding numerous children, often in their later years raising grandchildren.

In the summer they tended large gardens, went berry picking by horse and wagon or on foot, and went hunting and fishing with their spouses so the meat and fish could be dried and smoked for preservation. During winter months while their spouses were out on traplines for extended periods of time, the women had to assume responsibility for outside chores as well. Some families had a few head of cattle, some horses, chickens, and sometimes pigs. It was not uncommon for women of that generation to snare rabbits or hunt for ducks, partridges, or other small game as required while their husbands were away. Women without spouses relied on others to assist and often developed their own strong survival skills. Many women made clothing, mostly moccasins, for their families, from tanned moose hides. Some of their products were sold to supplement the household income.

These hard-working women were continually busy managing their family units. Their involvement in the broader community was limited. Métis men were responsible for activities outside of the home. In matters related to the community, it was generally the men who attended public meetings. The women's influence on decisions that affected indigenous people in the area was indirect, through their spouses.

These Métis women of my grandmother's generation, together with their spouses, considered the well-being of the greater community. They would ensure that the collective needs of the people were being met. Food was distributed to families in need, including non-Native people who needed assistance. Men who were good hunters provided food for their families and others in the community. The children often helped distribute the food as instructed by their mothers.

In Slave Lake, a town inhabited by a mixture of Native and non-Native people, community matters were controlled by non-Native people, largely men. Métis men's roles were minimal in local community decision making. Métis people who did not speak English fluently had little influence, if any, on matters that extended beyond their families and the Native community.

Over time Métis people in the community began to participate in non-Native municipal governance. In the mid 1960s, when the provincial government's community development initiative was under way in the area, it contributed to the first Métis male (my

father) getting elected to Town Council. Later in the 1970s and 1980s, two other Métis men (my uncle, Henry Sinclair, and Mike Cardinal) became involved in municipal politics. Eventually, two of the three entered the political arena at the provincial level in mainstream provincial governance and in provincial Native politics. Mike Cardinal served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and Sam Sinclair as President of the Métis Association of Alberta. Henry Sinclair has served as a Board member of several Native organizations over the years, as well as the Deputy Mayor of Slave Lake.

Local Métis women did not participate directly in local politics. However, many of them became actively involved in service delivery for Native people beginning around the early 1970s. Their child-rearing responsibilities lessened as their children got older, enabling them to devote more attention to community service. They were instrumental in the development of the local Native friendship centre in the 1970s. Many volunteered countless hours to the friendship centre and other organizations and community events. Some later gained employment in local service delivery. These women and many Métis women of the subsequent generation are employed in service agencies, local schools, Native organizations, government departments, housing programs, counselling and social services, and local businesses. Some of the women are presently or have been single parents, and their employment is vital to sustain their families.

In addition, Aboriginal women from the Lesser Slave Lake area, MLA Pearl Calahasen and Senator Thelma Chalifoux, are in influential positions to initiate or support positive change for Aboriginal women and for Aboriginal people generally. Respect for Aboriginal women that was eroded over time by Euro-Canadian societal influences needs to continue to be restored. Aboriginal women are beginning to regain positions of respect and honour in families and communities as we look to the past in seeking direction for the future, particularly as self-government becomes more of a reality in our lives.

Our ancestral traditions teach us to value the roles of men and women equally in all aspects of life. Educating ourselves wholistically—emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually—involves becoming more aware of our culture. Building self-esteem and pride in our Cree ancestry helps to strengthen us as individuals, families, communities, and nations.

As a result of conducting the RCAP study and facilitating the oral history project, I have gained a deeper respect and appreciation for the contributions made by indigenous women, now our elders, in maintaining their families, instilling cultural values, and strengthening their communities. Some are more visible in the community than others. Regardless of visibility, their place in their families are central to the life of the community, and therefore should be revered. And finally, without support from the men, the women could not have devoted attention to their families as they did, and they too should be honoured.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMANTS' TESTIMONIES

List of Informants

#1. Mary Jane BELLEROSE
#2. Amanda BOISVERT
#3. Melanie BOTTLE
#4. Peter CAMPION
#5. Alice CARDINAL
#6. Mabel COURTOREILLE
#7. Julia FENTON
#8. Catherine GAIRDNER
#9. George GAIRDNER
#10. Mary GIROUX
#11. Ned GLADUE
#12. Anne GULLION
#13. June HOULE
#14. Charlie JACKSON
#15. Pauline JOHNSON
#16. Sandra LAVALLEE
#17. Madge MCCREE
#18. Margaret MCDONALD
#19. Evelyn NORBERG
#20. Elsie SAVARD
#21. Eleanor SAWAN
#22. Sam SINCLAIR

LANGUAGE

1. Do your children speak Cree? What about your grandchildren?

The only one [of six] who's trying his best is Henry. The three of Henry's kids who are with their Indian mom [speak Cree]. (Interview #1)
Hardly any. I was a fool for not talking Cree to them right away. There was a priest who was good friends with us. . . . He told us not to teach them anything in Cree. We sure made a mistake. Now they are madder than hell that they don't know. (Interview #9)
My oldest children speak Cree, but my grandchildren don't. (Interview #12)
The oldest child speaks Cree and the grandchildren do too. (Interview #15)
No, but they understand a few phrases. One of my grandchildren is taking Cree in school and he's doing pretty good. (Interview #19)
No, very little. I don't speak Cree that well at all. My grandchildren don't speak Cree. (Interview #17)

2. Did/do your parents speak Cree or English at home?

They both talked Cree. My dad could speak some English and my mother understood but she couldn't speak it fluently. We had to translate when somebody spoke here—we had to tell her what it was about. She used to say, "I might not be able to read or write but you guys go to school and don't give up, just keep going." And that's what we did, the girls, but not the boys—they dropped out. They had other things in mind, like going to work for a living. (Interview #1)
My parents both spoke Cree at home. My dad could speak English but my mother couldn't. My dad had a good education—his dad sent him to (school in) Winnipeg. . . . He went to high school. . . . My mother could write in Cree. (Interview #9)
They spoke Cree and we did too. My oldest kids couldn't speak English when they first went to school. We used to live in camps and they didn't go to school until they were older. There was no schools in the camps and no bus to take them until later. So we moved to Slave Lake and bought land and a house so our kids could go to school. (Interview #12)
Mostly Cree, very little English. My stepfather speaks a lot of English. (Interview #15)
My parents both spoke Cree at home, but I was in residential school for many years. (Interview #17)
English. . . . [I learned Cree] when I was very young, about seven or eight. A Native woman lived with us. She couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak Cree—that's where I learned it. My mother and Dad both spoke it but never used it at home. When a Native came along, they spoke in Cree, but they never spoke to us in Cree. Two in the family learned it—my brother and my sister. (Interview #18)

EDUCATION

3. Did you go the mission (residential school)?

I went as far as Grade 8 in Grouard [mission], and then we transferred to Peace River from there. Then after Grade 10 the school burned down in Peace River, so I never went

back. I stayed home and helped Mom. She had so many kids. We had to wash [clothes] by hand the hard way, and they had cows to milk, lots of work to do. (Interview #1)
I went to the convent in Grouard. I rode on the steamboat both times—twice in two years. [Translation] (Interview #3)
No, but my mother did. She was actually an orphan from her early teens, and she was there until she was 18. She could read and write and also write Cree syllabics. My dad could read and write and was sharp in mathematics. (Interview #4)
Yes. . . . It was mostly Treaty kids that went to the Mission. I guess the parents [of Métis children] paid for the kids to go to school. My mother was a Treaty, so she could put us all in there. (Interview #8)
No, I never go to school. My [first] wife I think go to school. She can talk English pretty good and she can read. Myself, I can't read, nothing. I never go to school myself. I used to work all the time in my life [for] White people. That's why I pick up a little for myself—talk English. . . . Just me mostly stay in the bush all the time [in] my family. My mother all the time stay in the bush. No chance to go to school. That's bad for me. (Interview #11)
No, and neither did my parents. Nobody ever did. They went to regular school. I don't think they went very much though. Years ago there were hardly any schools, and if there was a school they had to go a long ways, and there was no buses at those times. They had to walk or use horses. (Interview #20)
I was in residential school from age 7 to 16 years—eight years in Grouard, then one year in a girls' dorm. . . . They didn't accept us in public school, and if we didn't go, we were forced to go. They could lay charges, yet we couldn't go to school at home. We weren't allowed there. Some of the kids were home until they were seven; then they had to go. (Interview #21)

4. Were the attitudes toward White women in the community different from the attitudes toward local Native women? If yes, in what way? (i.e., Did such attitudes affect young female residential school students?)

Yes, I think so. It seems to me the Whites used to go with the Whites and the Indians among their own. I think there was discrimination. There were separate groups. (Interview #1)
As far as I felt, myself, everybody got along. . . . The only discrimination that I really felt and my kids felt, even going to school, was, in those days when you went on welfare you weren't given extra money to buy clothes for yourself. Once or twice a year you were given clothes, so everybody was able to identify who the kids were that were on welfare because they all had the same jackets or the same boots or whatever, and the kids did get teased for that. But that's more or less being teased for being on welfare, not for being an Indian. Other than that I didn't feel discrimination. I always fit in, and I was invited to places where White people were. (Interview #2)
I guess there was an attitude difference between the Aboriginal people and the White society. When I was going to the schools, we were always looked down on. (Interview #4)
We got along with the White people. I couldn't speak English, but we still got along. (Interview #7)

In some ways it seems the Native women were "put aside." They'd bring in the White women—first. In some ways that's what I'd see anyway. (Interview #10)
It was better years ago. Everybody was the same. There was never any feeling that you were different. (Interview #19)

EMPLOYMENT

5. Were you (or your wife, if male) employed outside of the house? What kind of jobs?

I went to work past Edmonton to help my sister Clara as a cleaning woman. And I worked for Nash's for about 20 years as a cleaning lady. (Interview #1)
We both worked. She worked in hospitals. That's where I met her, when I broke my leg. When we moved . . . she went to work as a cook in a cafe. Then she worked for FCSS for quite awhile—lots of community involvement. In my younger days, I did forestry, sawmills. I made lumber, outdoor work and heavy construction, road building. . . . My mother worked beside my father. He was a contractor in log harvesting. Before the early '50s, they used a hand saw, and my mother worked beside him. . . . It was common within the Aboriginal community. (Interview #4)
I worked as a cleaning lady for different people and I was a cook in camps. . . . My mother used to clean house too. (Interview #5)
When I quit school, I was 16 and went to work in a cafe. I couldn't pass my grade so I quit school. I did lots of farm work too, stooking and stuff. I went out working in McBride, B.C., as a kitchen helper. I worked a lot outside of the house. But I got TB. I was about 27 and couldn't work any more. . . . My mother never worked outside the home. (Interview #7)

6. How have things changed for Native women today in the area of employment?

I see a lot of Native women working, driving trucks and [employed in] road construction. They have more technological skills than in the past. Maybe it's because of the education. More and more parents, including myself, are pushing their children to get educated. In the mid '40s and the early '50s they didn't push their children as much as they do today. I wasn't really pushed. I felt I had to go out and work and make a living as we had such a big family. In those days it was a man's responsibility to get out and help the family. I didn't have to help support them—I did it because [my father] asked me to. You had to work in order to survive, and I wanted to learn. This was before welfare came on line, which ruined a lot of Native people. Prior to those days, everybody had to work and everybody survived. We were strong and healthy. (Interview #4)
It's changed so much that most young women I see today, even if they have a husband and a family, they're still out working. These days it seems like it's harder for a man to get a job than a woman. Things have changed so much, I would even say in the last five years. In the olden days a woman was never hired for a job because she was Native—and that only changed in the last few years right here in Slave Lake. The first Native woman I saw that worked here in a store was . . . hired because she talked Cree to the Natives. When you think about it, it was a rough life for Natives amongst Whites. (Interview #18)
It's remarkable how it's changed. There was no businesses here then. If you were educated there was no work here until they built the hotel and the hospital. (Interview #19)

I would say probably jobs are a little more plentiful now, but we still kind of leave the dirty part of the jobs for the Aboriginal women. A lot of it is lack of education. Even if they are knowledgeable, they are never recognized by the White sector and given equal opportunity. I always find, looking through my life in comparison to our Native women, they've been discriminated heavily through life, by never getting a decent wage—no comparison to the men's wages. They weren't allowed to do some of the jobs they are allowed to do now. But things have changed; there is a lot of automatic machines that anybody can handle. I see a lot of women now on road construction, and even on pipelines, that you wouldn't even think of 30 or 40 years ago. (Interview #22)

7. Who handled the money in the household when you were young?

My dad, but there wasn't very much money anyway and not very much welfare either; . . . now it is different. We used to trade moose meat for potatoes, lard, or butter. You could get credit at the stores when you traded the furs. We had to have gardens too—and all the kids would work. My mother would use a horse to dig potatoes with the plough. . . . We would put the meat in the well where there was ice. Muskeg—you'd dig there and put your stuff [to keep it cold]. We'd get moss out of the muskeg and use it for diapers. (Interview #6)

We didn't have any money. We used to get so much money from the Hudson's Bay store. We'd charge things—then my dad paid. (Interview #9)

My mother, she did all the shopping. In those days we only shopped on paydays. Not like today, they shop two or three times a day. But in those days when my father's cheque would come in, my mother would take it. We had credit at the store. She'd pay the bill and whatever was left, she'd buy something else. So the bill was carried on two weeks at a time. (Interview #14)

My mother was always the banker. She was really strict about money but also fair. My dad was never known as a good money handler. He used to like to drink. If he handled the money, a lot of it would be wasted, but he was never allowed to do so. He was mostly the money maker and my mother would do the managing. (Interview #22)

8. What impact did the introduction of commercial fishing, logging, and the oil industry have on the traditional way of life in the community?

The oil industry took lots of fur out of the land; it scares the fur-bearing animals out with all that noise. We don't hardly see any more of those animals. We're lucky if we even see a bear. We saw one coyote and a couple deer. The oil [industry] is interfering, and logging too, with the hunting and trapping. Animals don't go close. (Interview #1)

It may have had an impact in those days, where survival was a must. A lot of the Native people, including my father, knew nothing other than logging. Today we have Greenpeace people saying there is enough of this logging. We have got to shut it off. But to the Native people, say 10 years ago, they didn't know anything but logging. In the oil field they were laborers, slaves; in other words, I guess, they didn't know nothing else. They did selective logging at that time, but today they reforest the clearcuts, so I guess it depends on how big the timber was. If it was big, they took all the big timber and left the little ones. In some cases, the little ones would be destroyed by wind because there would be nothing to support it. There was no wind breaks or anything. Personally, I think today's technology might be slow in regenerating the trees, but they will come back. Life has got to go on.

Sure, we are taking out the timber, but if we stop the forest activities, what are the people going to do? (Interview #4)

It affected lots. I think that is why the people are so sick today and there are so many changes today, because of the disrespect for Mother Earth. As soon as people start disrespecting Mother Earth, they start to disrespect each other too. There is no respect for each other, and people are trying to outdo each other, not like a long time ago. It's done a lot, the logging, and especially the oil rigs. It took away the trapping. . . . I can remember some logging when I was a kid as my dad used to do that. . . . [The current logging practices are] going to have an effect on the trapping and the medicines, on healing. Some of the trees they are taking down are medicine trees. It is absolutely going to have an effect. . . . They are slaughtering. They are not respecting the forests. A long time ago when people used to take trees, they'd leave space. We'd take one here and one there. Now I notice they are just taking everything. How will the trees revive themselves? These are all big issues—the trees, the air, the water—all because everybody has lost respect. (Interview #17)

HUNTING, FISHING, AND GATHERING

9. How did people decide to go on a hunt or to go fishing? (i.e. where, when, who?)

All that to the north here was bush country, and they had horses and teams. They took a week's supply of food. They made bannock or bread and got the basics like flour or sugar and they went in the bush. . . . The kids and all of us went on a wagon. And we set up a tent there. It was like a picnic to us. . . . Both Mother and Dad decided when or where we would go. They'd talk it over, and then the day when we were ready, we would go, lock up the place and go. (Interview #1)

My dad was a hunter, but he only hunted for the family. He didn't hunt anything that was unnecessary. He hunted to feed us. He would go by himself, until we were old enough and then he'd take one of the boys and go. He'd only go for a day. He was a moose caller and he'd get his moose. That was it—two days at the most. . . . My mother would sometimes go . . . just to be with him and away from the family. She made dry meat and canned it. She tanned the hide. That was another way of survival. I don't know what she got for it, but she'd sell the hide or make moccasins for us. I don't remember her going out selling moccasins. (Interview #4)

He'd go out alone; . . . he'd take short hunting trips in the afternoon. Then he would come back and get my mother and grandmother to fetch the meat. Sometimes they'd go out to the bush for a week and set up camp to dry the meat so it wasn't as heavy. My dad worked in Spurfield, and he did trapping too. (Interview #5)

As far as I can remember, if anybody needed any meat, they went out with their horses and shot their moose or whatever they could get, because then people weren't bothered about you, when you got the meat to feed your family. It's not like nowadays, you have to go pay a big price for a permit and be watched like a hawk. In those days if you needed meat, you went out and got it. Nobody would bother you. (Interview #18)

10. What did the women do while the men were away on hunting trips?

My mother managed the house when he went trapping. She looked after the kids. That was a lot of work—she was busy. She had to get the wood, haul the water—no running

water, nothing. You had to do your own work outside and inside. There was a lot of work to be done. (Interview #20)

My mother would go with him sometimes to help dry the meat, and my grandmother would stay behind with us. (Interview #5)

My mother was just like a man. She used to go trapping. She could do anything—she fished and provided for the family. The only thing I didn't like about my mom is she helped too many people. We had a big garden and she gave most away; she couldn't refuse anyone. She was good-hearted. (Interview #9)

One thing I can remember is people would go and shoot ducks in the fall. And they'd bring all the ducks to Mom because Mom could pluck ducks and then they'd give her half. She'd clean them for everybody, and that's how we got meat. It's the same thing as years ago, I remember. . . . They'd bring rabbits to her and she'd clean [them] and get two or three rabbits. (Interview #2)

Note: For this interview with a woman in her 90s, the question was asked: **"Did your husband do any hunting?"** The interviewee's daughter assisted the interpreter, and she answered part of the question as follows:

Daughter: "Yes, all we lived on was wild game. He [her father] was a good provider. They always had moose meat. She [her mother] used to kill rabbits, ducks, geese, and muskrats when her husband was working out of town."

(Then the daughter translated her mother's story about when they went hunting while her father was working out of town, and they had no meat at the time. She said she woke up one of her daughters [Mabel] and took her hunting for geese).

Daughter: "We could hear them [geese]. She had a double-barrel shotgun. She pulled both barrels, knocking herself and me over. And then she jumped up and said, 'Well, we probably didn't kill anything.' And here, there was nine of them laying; she killed nine of them with one shot. That was at Horseshoe Pond; that's where we went. She had a dog helping her catch these geese."

So the men hunted for the big game and the women for the smaller game?

Daughter: "When the men weren't around they [the women] did it on their own. Dad was a timber cruiser, and his job took him out of town lots. He was up in Hinton and other places . . . She shot a moose but she didn't kill it—she missed. It scared her, so she missed. But I know she brought a deer home once; she did manage to kill a deer once." [Translation] (Interview #3)

11. How did people decide to go and pick berries? (where, when, who?)

Some of us went; not everybody went. Some had to stay home and watch the cows, . . . so we'd go with the horse team. . . . A whole wagon load of us would go sometimes—just for the day. We'd come back in the evening. The girls and boys, we had to go. And Dad had to drive; he used to pick too. (Interview #1)

Most of the Métis women did all that—picking berries, canning, canning meat, and all that because there was no fridges, deep freezes. They had to do canning or make drymeat. My mom used to dry meat. I also made a lot of drymeat in my day. Mostly just my own family [children] went picking berries together. Some of the kids, when they were big enough, would stay home to cook and do the housework for the ones who picked the berries. We'd

go picking with the tractor. It had a box in the back, and that's where we put the berries. (Interview #20)

We had to pick berries and they canned them. And then we'd pick duck eggs and mud hen eggs as we used to eat them too. . . . We were poor a long time ago. We all had to work, even the kids, everybody. (Interview #6)

My mom and all the kids used to go and pick berries. My dad would come too when he was home. My dad had a trapline, and he'd be gone for a few days. When he left we'd get by; she would sell moccasins. (Interview #7)

Whoever wanted berries, you just hooked up your team and away you went, kids and all. I've seen a lot of women have buggies, load up the kids, take food with them, and away they'd go in the bush and pick berries all day and then come home. [They'd team up with other women.] It was more or less like a little picnic at the same time. (Interview #18)

My mother would set up the camps. If we went camping or if we went on our own, we'd just go with my mother—walk. We just knew where to go. The berries were plentiful then. Mostly it was the women, but it depended who was around. Mom would make everybody pick; 'course it was good for money because we could sell our berries. We got "show" money and "book" money. Our cousins would come, and we'd have a good time. When we sold the berries we had to buy our books, and the rest would go to Mom. Then she'd give us "show" money. (Interview #19)

HEALTH CARE

12. In the "old days," what happened with people who became sick in the community? How were they cared for?

There used to be a nurse going around. That nurse used to live in "Old Town" here. They had a little medicine, and they knew how to inoculate, I guess. (Interview #1)

There was no doctor. They used home remedies. They used roots and herbs from different trees and flowers. [Translation] (Interview #3)

My grandmothers, my mom, my dad, they all knew what herbs to use. (Interview #5)

My grandfather was looked after by my aunts, or my brothers or uncles looked after him. I can't recall ever being sick. When we got chicken pox or measles, we were looked after by our parents. They used herbals; I can't remember ever going to a doctor, for that matter. I can't remember anyone in my family going to the hospital, maybe because of the distance. (Interview #4)

My mother was a midwife. There was no doctors around, so that is what she did. (Interview #8)

Note: This elderly gentleman was asked similar questions in the following manner:

Were there doctors and nurses in the area? No doctors that days, only one doctor, only at High Prairie; and some place like Kinuso, one nurse in there. I think one at Athabasca and one at High Prairie; not too many nurses that time, . . . nothing at Wabasca.

What did they do if people got sick then? Well, no place to go; Indian medicine they used. There was no doctor, no nurse, nothing.

Who looked after them with Indian medicine? Was it women or men? Both of them. Some of the men are good for Indian medicine. Some of the old ladies [were] good for Indian medicine too—like my mother, she was a good one too. I know quite a few things for Indian medicine myself from my mother. She showed me what to do, what to use for

what kind of sickness you got. . . . You go up there in the bush. I went with her lots of times, . . . pick out the roots, put tobacco first before you pick them up. Now she'll tell you this one's supposed to be for what kind of sickness you have. You use that one and different ones maybe, not only one; sometime two, three different ones you mix together, like if you got bad flu, rheumatism, or if you got tuberculosis. (Interview #11)

13. Who delivered the babies in the community? Were there any midwives?

The midwives. There were women who were good at it. There were a few of them—Mrs. Boisvert and Mrs. Helen Dominic [Giroux]. (Interview #1)
Midwives would help them at home. Midwives were mostly the old one, the grandmothers, but there were some young ones helping. (Interview #17)
Both my grandmothers. (Interview #5)
My mother was a good cook and a good worker, as she worked like a man. She looked after women having babies, her and Mrs. Twin. My dad was related to Mrs. Twin. We lived five miles from the Twins, and they were always together. I deliver babies too. I have only done one [alone], but I help the doctors too . . . when they need help. My mom delivered lots; they would come and get her with a wagon or an old cart. (Interview #6)
There was an old lady, Mrs. Loyie. She probably delivered us. (Interview #7)
Mrs. McDonald and Sophie Boisvert were the ones I knew about. (Interview #19)
Note: This interviewee was queried as follows:
Your mother was a midwife, wasn't she? Yes. There was a big "write-up" in her obituary . . . about how she was the "mother" of 1,000 kids in Slave Lake. . . . She was the main midwife, . . . even after Nurse Attrux was here. Nurse Attrux and her would go out together until they built the hospital. Then she didn't do it anymore.
Did people pay her? Some of them paid her. Some paid with groceries, but a lot of them people didn't have any money. If you got something, then fine. She didn't set a price that she charged anybody. (Interview #2)

RELIGION

14. What was the influence of Christianity in the community? How has it changed today?

I think, for myself, it has helped me being in a convent, and that's all you heard was religion, every day, every day. And my mother was religious; it wasn't hard for me to go to church. And then when I was on my own, I still thought of the same thing: "Now I have kids, I've got to show them examples." Once you got it instilled in you, it's not hard. (Interview #1)
Well, I'm not a strong Catholic believer, but even though the priest used to say, "You must do this, you must do that or you are a sinner"—a lot of brainwashing. I used to be brainwashed. . . . It doesn't have the same impact today. There are more and more spiritual ways coming back, the traditional ways. (Interview #4)
I didn't go to church too much. My grandmother went to church. It has changed lots today. What I notice nowadays is that there are hardly any Natives in church; it's mostly White people in the Catholic church. People seem to be going into different groups. (Interview #5)

Fear, they worked with fear. My family tried to work with love because love is the highest power. Creator is the highest power, and love is the second highest power. Them, they worked with fear. If you did something wrong, then you'd go to hell. . . . Their dictation was fear, and it's still there today. That is why our people are so pathetic; they are scared they are doing wrong all the time. They don't have a free spirit. But the Indian way is freeing your spirit. A lot of these young medicine men get caught up in fear also because they haven't practiced it real long. The practice on your own is learning about that—where you have to be kind, and to do good to people. . . . The rule of our ancestors is kindness. (Interview #17).

I think it had a lot of influence, more so than it has now. . . . There were more people who believed in the Catholic church. Now there is more Native culture and you are more able to see the culture, and it sort of swayed me away, because the way they believe, there never was a church. They practiced their own beliefs without the church. And the way they believe now is that you live day by day, and if you follow a good path, if you walk the good road, you don't have to go into a church to pray—you can pray anywhere. Like a Sunday, it's not that important for me any more to go to church and pray like it used to be. It's kind of confusing, as I was raised Catholic and sometimes I don't know if I'm doing the right thing. . . . My grandmother was very religious. She was a Catholic, and my dad and my mother were. And I guess being raised in the mission, they always went to church. I think that had something to do with me not enjoying church because we used to go so much that we got tired of it. The church had a strong influence with birth control. That was the problem with me: After I had my fifth child, I was told not to have any more because of my health. I had a hard time making a decision and I had another one, and then the doctor was really strong about me not having another one. I talked to a lot of the doctors here. It was a lady doctor, and I told her I was having a hard time because of my religion. She told me that it was more important that I was in good health—to worry about that, as I had six children to look after. If I continued having children, I might not have been here. But it was really hard for me to get it done because of that. I felt guilty and scared. It did have a lot of influence on me. It doesn't really affect my kids. (Interview #21)

MARRIAGE AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

15. When you got married, how was it decided which community to live in?

I wanted to be near my folks. There was a cabin over here. That's where we got to live, in a cabin close to them so I could help them. I knew she needed help. I was young and full of energy. (Interview #1)

It was decided on by employment, and I think it is the same today. It is much easier for us to survive now. It would be fair to say that it depended mostly on my employment. (Interview #4)

We stayed with my mother when we first got married until we found another place to stay. . . . Families would help set you up, though you wouldn't necessarily live with them. (Interview #12)

Note: The next interviewee was asked the following questions:

So you picked your own wife, then? Yes.

When you got married did you go and live with your wife's family, or did your wife come and live with your family? No, we just moved away. We had our own place. We never stayed at anybody's place. I had my own place right away.
Where did you live? Desmarais, after we moved from there to Sucker Creek.
Where was your wife from? Desmarais.
But you got your own place in Desmarais? Yes.
Were both of your parents from Sucker Creek? Yes, my mother came from Desmarais, but we moved down there to Sucker Creek.
Did your parents or grandparents tell you that when you got married you had to live with the wife's family, or did they say that the wife had to go live with the husband's family? Well, you just think about you, which way is best. You don't have to tell anybody because you're your own boss. (Interview #11)

LEADERSHIP

16. In the "old days," were there leaders or spokespersons in the community? If so, who were they?

Different men—White men. Old Schurter used to be a leader. And some women, Mrs. Schurter and different women too. They'd form like a council. That used to be in "Old Town" here. They [the leaders] were mostly all White people, because our people were not too well-educated and they figured that it's not for us, and they didn't invite us anyway. And they [Native people] didn't speak too much English, so how were they going to cope in the White man's area? (Interview #1)
There might have been, but there weren't that many, maybe one or two. There are more now, but there were only a few in those days. They said they were elected, but we often wondered how they did it. It is not like it is today with polling booths. A lot of people didn't read, so they wouldn't have known what to do with their papers. My community was all Native people. (Interview #13)
Not too much in my time. People pretty well went the way they wanted to go. (Interview #14)
They had someone who spoke for the community. It was always the dominant society that dictated to us, to the Native people, as to what was happening. They were generally White, but my father was one of the Native leaders. He told them what he felt. (Interview #15)
Not really. I am more aware of it now that I am older, but not when I was a kid [in Wabasca]. I remember one [Native] lady who was quite vocal, and now she's considered a leader. I knew back then that she was heard, but not [necessarily] that she was a leader. (Interview #16)
Everybody was a leader, but there was a lot of hidden leaders, women especially. Their inner strengths, . . . they were strong, but not up-front. We had to go up front [in later years] for survival, but still I'd like to see the woman back in her place. One of these days we might see it, when the circle becomes strong. . . . There were no overall leaders; there were community leaders and heads of families. The mother was the hidden leader who gave advice to the man who was the leader. My mother was the centre of the circle in our family. . . . There was a chief on the reserve [west of Slave Lake], but I don't remember

too much about him. . . . I can't remember leadership really being strong [in Slave Lake] until the Métis Association came up. . . . But leadership then was very hidden, not right out front like it is now—it's too out front. (Interview #17)

Oh yes, in our family there was my brother, Sam. He was "up there" in the community development field. He was a go-getter. Some people looked towards him for leadership. And then later on in a different time, decade, my brother Henry was looked upon as a leader. . . . Ferman L'Hirondelle at one time was a spokesman in the community. He was well-respected and honest. (Interview #19)

Oh yes, they were there. The elders that we talked about earlier [in the interview], those were the people who were looked upon when there was a difficult situation, whether it was sickness, lack of jobs. . . . They were the ones people went to to try and find a way to solve what was affecting the community. They would almost be like what we have now as the Chamber of Commerce: business leaders who make decisions to help the community. (Interview #22)

17. Did Native people lead? If so, were they men or women?

Halfbreeds were more or less on their own—neutral. . . . No one was bossing them—you lived like everybody else. Your neighbour could be White or anybody. [Translation] (Interview #3)

Not really amongst the Natives themselves. The Treaties had leaders who are chiefs. But with the Métis, naturally there was the Métis Association way back, but there was none here. [But people would go for advice or counselling.] If they'd run into a problem, they'd gather and say, "Maybe we should go and see him; he'd know better." They would go and see an elder, more or less, sometimes relations like your grandfather or your uncle. You would go for advice if you weren't sure of something. They also went to women. Women played quite a role in all activities in my time. (Interview #14)

There were [leaders], but they were shy or they held back. You couldn't force them to be leaders, but they had the tendencies. We had many like that, but they were not go-getters; . . . they didn't want to be bothered with too much of a responsibility. . . . We really didn't need leaders. We were all about the same. It depends on what we were doing, but some did more than others. I guess those ones could be considered leaders. Mostly things were done in a community effort. (Interview #19)

Women, I would say, were the strongest in the Native communities when where was a crisis, but they would bring their men in when they were needed. But usually the woman called the shots. (Interview #22)

18. What were the characteristics of a good male leader? Have they changed today?

My dad [Pat] was a real good hunter, and he was the lead one. . . . It was because he was a good hunter. He used to talk for the other people. He started the Métis organization [in the area]. He went to see Peter Tomkins. He would ride a horse and travel around organizing people. This was a long time ago; I was about 11 years old. (Interview #6)

If [you are] good, the people will like you. [You are] everybody's friend. . . . [You] tell the people what is supposed to be good, what they are supposed to do. That's a good leader. . . . The good people, they'll tell you what is supposed to be good, . . . what to do for hunting—mostly hunting at that time; there was not much work. (Interview #11)

He understood English. He could read and write, and it was important that you could count so you could deal with money. (Interview #15)
He'd have to be strong, a "grassroots" leader, where the decisions come from bottom up, not top down. He has to be somebody who's been there, who knows where the people have come from and what their concerns are. And somebody who knows he's got rights and can stand up for them and is not willing to back down because of political pressure. (Interview #16)
I think humor had a lot to do with accepted leadership. People who knew how to make others laugh was considered a good community leader in a way because, besides making people laugh, he'd make some statement that relates to a bit of a crisis, like maybe lack of food. He'd make a joke out of it, but he'd also do something about it too. He'd say, "*Taskoc* [pronounced tahskohts] *kapowin kitim'naw*," which means, "We'll throw away our laziness." "*Mahti kamacanaw*" [pronounced kahmahtsahnaw] means "we'll go hunting." Some of the people in that group might not be hunters, but they'd say, "I'll go along and look after the horses while you guys hunt." It would be like a team. (Interview #22)

19. What were the characteristics of a good female leader? Have they changed today?

She made beadwork and all kinds of things, mukluks, moccasins, jackets. She would sell them to provide for the family. (Interview #3)
They were the leaders [Mrs. Twin and my mom]; they knew how to make moccasins and everything. Mrs. Twin did the beadwork, and my mom sewed the moccasins. They used to sell them at ten dollars a pair then. (Interview #6)
Female leaders would be the same [as the male leaders]. They wouldn't be scared to challenge or to talk to anybody. If you needed advice, even now if you need advice, you usually ask a woman leader who you would go to for counselling, Native counselling. Before this [Native] counselling service, they would probably go to people they had confidence in to help them. There was always somebody you could go to, especially within the family, and get support from each other. (Interview #21)
People [women] who could sew well were considered good leaders within a community; people who could make good moccasins, good beaders; ones who could make good dry meat were at the top; church-goers showed good leadership. They'd invite people and feed them after [church], things that pulled the community together. A lot of women did that. It was kind of a way of life. People would come out of church and say, *"Nikanahk 'petotet,"* which means, "Come to our place." And they maybe already prepared some special food they were going to feed people. People who were poor very seldom invited anybody because they couldn't afford to feed people, but they would get invited some place. At one time it gave people pride to be able to help other families get that extra meal. It was considered almost like bailing someone out of jail. (Interview #22)

20. Were leaders chosen or how did people decide who would be their leader or spokesperson?

I guess they were elected when they formed little meetings. . . . But the Native people were never invited [to the meetings]. . . . The White people used to haul the Native people all over to take them to town to vote and tell them where to put their X. It was Liberal a

lot of the time. Old Schurter would say, "Put it on the top." That's how they cheated. (Interview #1)

They would have little meetings. I remember I used to see them; they would sit outside by the fire and talk. That is how the men used to decide on things. . . . They didn't really vote like the way it is now. You had to lift your hand if you wanted to pick someone. They usually picked my dad, as he was real smart. He went to school and everything. When they needed help, that is who they would come to. (Interview #6)

There was always chiefs [on the reserves]. And there were always leaders who would help you and direct you with where you wanted to go. I think people who had the knowledge were chosen. If they went out in the world for awhile and they learned different skills that a lot of people in the community didn't have, they would bring back that knowledge, by working in the community. They weren't as isolated, and they gathered knowledge, . . . and they'd come back with it. (Interview #21)

I think it was by their actions. In a small community, if you watch the actions of people, when there's a need somewhere, the person will go to someone they most respect who can help them out. There's almost a steady path to those elders who can be of value in dealing with the crisis at hand. Those kind of leaders did not come and go. When people got to be respected elders, they learned over a period of time. . . . If somebody came from a different community who was known to be a good hunter or a good leader of some sort, he was well-known. When he arrived in the community, he was almost welcomed like he was a champion. (Interview #22)

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

21. Were the Native women ever involved in any meetings in the community?

Just the White women. (Interview #1)

I don't remember that happening in Wabasca when I was a kid. . . . In Slave Lake I think the White women were involved, but not the Native women. (Interview #16)

Oh yes, more women than men [in the later years]. (Interview #19)

22. Do you vote in local, provincial, and federal elections? Do your spouse, daughters, and sons vote?

Yes, we all vote. (Interview #12)

I used to, but now I don't know if I should now since we became Treaty. We haven't got a band. . . . They are trying to get it organized again. (Interview #8)

23. What does the term *self-government* mean to you?

Self-government is to get a leader and to have a certain amount of people around him like a committee, and they'd give the rules and regulations like a town council. But then they'd want to get the money too, and where would the money come from? And which people is he going to give it to, just his favorite? (Interview #1)

Something that people want to do on their own—nowhere the Whites look over you. (Interview #10)

That the Natives get to rule and to do their own decision making as to how the community should be run. I think it is a good policy. But on the other hand, the financial policy, the government will give them a set amount to work with, and when that is gone they are

right back to where they are today—nowhere, nothing—and that is scary for me when I look at it. I'd like our people to have their own self-government and means for helping people themselves, but then what about the self-government discriminating against the non-Native peoples in the current government? What about Métis people? And then the Bill C-31s are discriminated against; they are nothing, just a number. It would be good if we are going to deal with all Native people, no matter how much [Indian] blood you have. You can say you are Native and that person can be proud of that. That is how I am, but I can't go any further than that as an individual. (Interview #15)

Self-government means a Native band can govern its own welfare, whether that means social services or whatever. They have the right to decide what's right for their people. (Interview #16)

I don't really know, but I do know that people should be looking after themselves more. I think they should quit depending on all these organizations for everything. There are too many people trying to help, but they are failing. I really feel that the White people are failing the Indian people terribly. Indian people should be helping themselves because their values and structures are different. They [White people] don't work from their hearts; everything is mind work, where with our people, it comes from the heart and that is why we have to start helping our people. But then a lot of Indian people who become trained in the White world become like them, and they start using their minds and they don't use their hearts anymore. That's why I don't really press people to go to school because I want them to learn from their hearts not just from their minds. (Interview #17)

It means the people would be able to look after themselves, more than they are now. Now they depend on the government for a lot of things. With self-government you'd be responsible for yourself, looking after your own affairs in the community. We'd probably have to work together to raise a lot of money, . . . to look after things; . . . but if people looked after themselves, . . . would they still have that money coming from the government? . . . They would have to administer the money themselves. . . . It would not go to Indian Affairs dividing up the money. (Interview #21)

I see it as having a very important heading. It's important to me because we need people to show some leadership—what self-government can do if people would just dig their heels in and participate in a manner as if you were elected in government. It's being willing to make sound decisions in cooperation with government, initially, with the understanding that with self-government all the decisions will be made by Aboriginal people, and to negotiate for funds to properly administer those decisions. I think it's a God-given right for Aboriginal people to be allowed resources to carry on with self-government—because the monies that have been expended, and a lot of it wasted amongst Aboriginal people, is there already. It just has to be pursued in a manner where you have better accountability and better access to future funding by negotiating with the top levels of both governments. (Interview #22)

24. How do you think "self-government" will change things in your community, particularly for women?

It could—some women are good at that. (Interview #10)

In this community it could change things, but it would depend on the leader. I don't think there would be a big effect for women. (Interview #13)

I don't think it will change things for women. Somehow the women get their voices in, but the men aren't listening anyway. They are still talking about the same issues they were talking about a few years ago, Native women and Bill C-31. When the Royal Commission came around the first time, that was a few years back and they are still talking about the same thing; nothing has changed. So when is the Royal Commission or any of those guys going to start making changes for the Native peoples and women? If Natives were all strong together that would be good, because they need to know that we are out here. (Interview #15)

I don't know if it would change anything for women. I think women would need to have their own women's council or something to do for women, for us to have change. I think we might be recognized now because I know women are important in Native society, but I don't know how much of that recognition would mean change. (Interview #16)

I watch our reserve and I see them doing a good job, especially with the custom election. It's getting the family unit involved again to speak for themselves. The chiefs and council have had their way for years, but now with the custom elections that they put into the reserve just recently, it is going to be "family say," not just chief and council. The leaders are at one level and the people at another, and sometimes the leaders do things that the people don't really want. There's too much decision making [at the top]—that's just like the government. It's the same thing. (Interview #17)

It would probably benefit the men before the women. It depends on the individuals. It reminds me of reserve life where the families of the leaders are the ones who benefit. If they are big families, they get all the "goodies." (Interview #19)

I think for women it will be an improvement. The way it's going in the White sector, they're electing more women in general. I see a positive step for Aboriginal women because they're showing more initiative in leadership, and they should be elected accordingly because of their efforts. In the future, I see nothing wrong with having more females as chiefs on reserves and more councillors in settlements, and also individual leaders within the community. (Interview #22)

GENDER ROLES

25. How would you describe a "good woman" years ago? What about today?

You should have compassion, be kind, and you should be honest, and have self-esteem and mix religion in your life. It makes it run better. If there's no God in the family, it seems like they don't care. And be a good housekeeper and a good seamstress too. (Interview #1)

A hard worker. Today it has changed so much. But I would base it on the working ability of the woman—whether it is housework—if she is "wife-like." By that I mean a woman who will stand by me, help me make my decisions, help me make my way with the family. I don't necessarily expect her to do all the laundry, but I expect her to wash and cook. There are days when she is tired or sick and I tend to take over, but other than that, I expect her to do those things that I mentioned. I wouldn't necessarily expect her to earn a living the same way I do. But if she wanted to do that, and bring in equal "bread and butter," I wouldn't have a problem with that. (Interview #4)

Somebody who is really giving and very nurturing and loving. I have a hard time because I am trying to think of my grandma, but my grandma wouldn't fit in today's world. Because nowadays women don't have the option sometimes to stay home. I just see her as being different if she had to go out and work and come home and look after my grandfather and me. I don't think she would be the same woman that I remember; . . . she would be under stress, and she'd have a lot more anxiety, where she didn't then. Everything was "happy-go-lucky"—there wasn't the "make money, pay bills," where it is now. And nowadays everything is so time-oriented, where back then it wasn't. (Interview #16)

Some of us like me didn't know how to raise a family because the family unit was broken down. Everyone is trying to get over this as the family unit in itself isn't strong as it was torn apart. . . . I was taught strictness and structure. At home, there was none of that; there was a lot of love. At residential school, they taught us that loving somebody or hugging somebody is wrong. (Interview #17)

Women who looked after their house well, who were good providers of food to their family and who stayed away from alcohol. Years ago, it was almost unknown to see a drunk woman. But if she was, she was labelled as one of the bad ones. She might have been good in a lot of other ways, but certainly drinking was not one of the things that was respected. . . . I think today women are still labelled by the performance of their work at home and their neatness. I think no one tolerates dirt, especially if they have good facilities. With the machines you have nowadays, there is no reason to be dirty. But then on the other hand, if people are "dirt" poor, they don't own washers and dryers and often don't even have the money to go and do their wash. (Interview #22)

26. How would you describe a "good man" years ago? What about today?

A good hard-working breadwinner that the kids would look up to as an example—that he takes them to church, takes them fishing and doesn't leave them alone—be a friend to them. (Interview #1)

Provided for himself, and if he was married, provided for his family. Today, it is still the same. (Interview #4)

Hunting, I guess [if he was a good hunter]—if he owned something, land or horses. (Interview #7)

Somebody who is respectful and very responsible. Somebody who can take care of his family and himself. And somebody who knows where he's come from and where he's going. (Interview #16)

Because of the lack of money back then, he was assessed on his success as a provider—if he was a good hunter and a good trapper. The trapping brought furs for groceries; the hunting brought food. And if you had livestock, you always had to make hay, and if you had lots of hay, that was considered successful. Also people who were known to go out and find jobs away from home were looked upon as being a little better than the other guy. . . . Looking at the younger people [today], I would say to satisfy me, a successful man is a young person who will listen, take advice when it counts, have a good personality and be willing to share responsibility, and being nice to people in general. I see a great future for people like that. A lot of them fill that category, but they're not overly plentiful. (Interview #22)

DECISION MAKING

27. How were women involved in decision making related to daily life, including place of residence, food-gathering, child-rearing, religious and/or ceremonial practices?

My dad got the last say in anything, but most of the time my mother was on her own to look after all of us. (Interview #2)
There was no such thing as decision making. I never heard anybody say anything about religion at home. My grandmother would tell us to get ready for church and we'd go. (Interview #5)
Women were involved in preparing the food—canning—and in raising the kids. My husband did most of the disciplining. (Interview #10)
Most of the decisions were made by the men, but the women made some decisions too. The women made sure the kids went to school and to church. (Interview #12)
They [women] made the decisions, in my family anyway. I think my mother demanded things rather than talking about it. Food gathering was my dad's, but the rest was all my mom's—probably because Dad was gone most of the time. Religion was never discussed. They were both Catholics, and so there was no argument about that. My dad didn't go to church very often. It was mostly my mom until a certain point, and it was just the kids. We had to go for her. (Interview #13)
In our home my mother pretty well had all the say in the house. I would think maybe Dad and Mom discussed a lot of things that we don't know anything about. But to us, Mom made all the decisions. (Interview #14)
Anything that was done in the house was my grandma Sarah's decision. I always remember my grandpa saying, "I could never give you a spanking," because Sarah wouldn't allow him. So in a sense, she had the upper hand there, in child rearing anyway. I think with decision making too. She had quite a say because she stood for what she believed in. He couldn't walk all over her or make her submissive. She believed in what she believed in, and there was no other way about it. . . . She was the religious one—she was the one who decided when they went to church . . . and any religious events that were happening. (Interview #16)
I think they were involved—all those things went into the family unit; they just became part of that. There wasn't much leadership—well, there was lots, but it was so hidden. It was done in a different way. There were no radicals, people hollering, demanding; . . . you never saw that long time ago. Everybody listened to each other. (Interview #17)

28. What do you remember about your mother's role with decision making in your family/community, when you were a child?

She was the one who did make the decisions, in the household mostly. The men long ago thought the mother was the one who was supposed to do all that, and sometime yet [today]. [She didn't have too much say in the community.] She'd send us big girls out to go listen if there was a meeting and come home and tell her what it was about. (Interview #1)
[She did not make decisions in the community] unless somebody had come for help. There was no community organizations at the time we were being raised. Everybody had their

own free go at whatever was going on—whatever gatherings there was. With baseball games, they were organized more or less by the white community; later on the Métis participated. (Interview #14)

If she said, "Do it," you did it. She used to do everything—hunting and farming. I think my mother felt they [her parents] made her work too hard. Her other brothers and sisters sat back. But she said before she died, "I think it is because my mother and father wanted me to know everything. They have given me a gift." She followed the traditional ways. (Interview #15)

She made all the decisions pretty well. We knew our dad was busy. He was the hunter, the trapper—he was the one who made the money. So we knew the mother did the rest. When the money would come in, Mom disbursed it. . . . She was a go-getter. (Interview #19)

My mother had no trouble making decisions. I don't know if it was because my dad didn't interfere too much. She was always the boss around the house. (Interview #22)

29. How do women influence decision making in their families and community today?

You've got young people now in politics, with the law, young women school teachers. They're really getting involved, and they know what's happening out there—and they voice their opinions. (Interview #2)

I think more so than before. I was lucky that my grandma was a good role model for me. I notice that we have a lot more role models for women to follow, so that makes a big impact. (Interview #16)

I think they do because there are a lot of women even in these [local] agencies who are employed, so they have the knowledge. I think a lot of times you can just share your past experience with a lot of these things that are going on, so people can relate. (Interview #21)

30. How much authority did men have in the family and community years ago? How has it changed today?

Men were involved with anything outside the house and women inside the house. The men used to go out if they were asked, to do things like haul wood for people. People would come to ask. (Interview #7)

I don't think they had that much [authority] in the family; maybe more in the community. . . . Today the men are more involved in the family life than they were years ago. They help with the upbringing of the kids. (Interview #13)

They had lots of it. I think they ran the community. . . . In the family, they didn't have very much there. Women were strong in the house; they had their say; in spite of the alcohol and abuse, they still had their say. When they spoke, their men jumped. (Interview #15)

My grandparents were different, almost like teenagers in love. They did things together. They kind of always had that youth in their love. I know for marriages for people who've been together for a long time, I think it happens a lot where the woman has her friends and family that she gets comfort from, and I think he does from his male friends and male relatives. (Interview #16)

You just had to take it. I wasn't the only one suffering; my kids did too. They suffered just as much as I did. He'd come home any time of the night—three, four o'clock. Everybody

would have to get up. He'd start fighting us after that. I'd be thrown out at night. Then I'd have to go sleep out in the bush across the creek in the jackpines. I had a dog that used to go with me, just in my nightgown. I'd stay there all night and come home in the daytime. That was an awful life. (Interview #20)

Some did and some didn't. Some women had more authority in the home than the men. But there were some men who had more authority than the women. . . . I think has changed now. . . . Years ago even when I was married, it was a tradition that men were supposed to be the head of the household. I think that was mainly because the woman always stayed home to look after the children. . . . I think because the women are getting out more, doing things more, we're starting to see more equality. They have a lot more authority than they used to. (Interview #21)

Quite a bit authority. It was up to them to take the leadership if they wanted to. Some of them left the responsibility with their wives for most of the time. Where I come from anyway, most of the leadership it seemed was amongst the Native women. [Today] . . . my wife and I share responsibility, especially in the family. We jointly make decisions relating to the family. . . . I see that as a value in raising families, that you both have to be willing to make decisions. (Interview #22)

ADAPTATION OF WOMEN

31. How did people (women) deal with new conditions in the community, such as in the 1960s when it becamé legal for Indian people to use alcohol and during the "oil boom"?

Some of them [women] just joined the men to go in the bars and some didn't. (Interview #1)

They went wild. I think that's when they really started drinking. (Interview #5)

[The alcohol abuse] really started in the '60s. It was quiet before the oil boom; then the kids started drinking. It was everybody who was drinking. It was the parents who drank, and they would leave the kids with someone. (Interview #6)

I remember the oil boom; I think the community didn't adjust very well. There was a lot of fighting going on. All these people came in and people started to drink a lot. It was Native and non-Native. But a lot of the fights were started by the people who were coming into town. They were invading the town, and the town people didn't really appreciate what they were doing, as it seemed like they just came in and tried to take over. They were without respect. (Interview #21)

Some of us adjusted the best way we knew how. We thought we were doing well, but we saw later how alcohol slowly moved into families, including my own, because there was more liquor available, brought in with the liquor store and additional bars. People's families were turned around. And with the new oil activities it brought in new young people [men] who mixed in with the young women in the local area. Even though some of them gained financially. It was destructive in the long run with families, and I think it's still hurting now. (Interview #22)

32. How did women deal with alcoholism in the family, spousal or sexual abuse, and family violence?

Sometimes she'd [her mother] just vanish away. She wouldn't stick around when there was drinking and fighting . . . [Women] would go to another household until that man was quiet and then come back when he was sleeping or sober. (Interview #1)

My mother never drank. My father drank, but at an early age; some of my younger brothers and sisters never saw my father drink. He quit when we were really young as he used to say that he didn't want to pass this stuff on to us, "so I've got to quit." We were fortunate in that way as alcohol was never a problem in our family. I've seen a lot of problems with other families, where alcohol has caused a lot of problems for the family. (Interview #4)

They never used to drink that much a long time ago. They used to make their own liquor; they knew how to stop. Now they don't know how to stop; they just keep on going. There were no drugs then either . . . There was some [spousal abuse and family violence]; you didn't hear about it much. They helped each other and kept it quiet. . . . They [women] just talked to each other to get help—maybe go to an older person. It was aired out; nobody went to jail. It didn't happen all the time. Things got dangerous once in a while, but not that often, years ago—not like now. (Interview #6)

Alcoholism and spousal abuse in those days was an accepted factor. They didn't know that alcoholism was a disease and spousal abuse was something that was not meant to be. At one point, my mother told me that if you get a beating, you were more loved by them. Several of them said that. They just let it be as if nothing had happened. The woman can sit there and say to the man, "You used to beat me," and he would sit there and shake his head and say, "Yeah, I did," but he would never admit that was wrong. It was accepted. (Interview #15)

It was very difficult. They just kept it at home. They stayed because they had nowhere to go—or some of them joined their spouses drinking. (Interview #19)

You just had to take it. I wasn't the only one suffering; my kids did too. They suffered just as much as I did. He'd come home any time of the night—three, four o'clock—everybody would have to get up. He'd start fighting us after that. I'd be thrown out at night. Then I'd have to go sleep out in the bush across the creek in the jackpines. I had a dog that used to go with me, just in my nightgown. I'd stay there all night and come home in the daytime. That was an awful life. (Interview #20)

This informant's responses were as follows:

Do you think there was a lot of alcohol abuse [in the community]?

Oh yes, there was. Even my mother drank a lot.

So it was quite common among Native people?

Yes.

And non-Native people?

I think everybody.

I remember there being a lot of alcohol abuse in the community [in the '60s]. Was it men who were doing most of the drinking, or was it both men and women?

It probably started out with men, because I remember the days when they used to segregate them in the bar. Women could only drink on one side and men in the other, or if

they drank together, you had to be with your husband. I think it started with the men. Then in order for the wives to keep their husbands at home, they either joined them or they'd lose them. (Interview #2)

33. How are things different now than they were for women of your parents' or grandparents' generation?

There's too much freedom and too much promiscuity. In our day, we weren't allowed to get far away. (Interview #1)

They used to help the other people. You have to pay them to help you now. . . . Years ago there was none of this money. We all helped each other and paid each other back with different favors. You would sew some clothes for somebody, and they would cut some ribs for you for nothing. It was trading. . . . Nowadays, they do everything. They take drugs and drink—all sorts of bad things. There is no family unity any more. They have lost that. A lot of people drink with their kids, and that is not good. Years ago we had a lot of discipline. But now if you tell them something, they just turn around and swear at you. (Interview #6)

Life is easier now. You have everything. You have running water. I know I had to do a lot of water fetching. The work load is easier now. Even raising a family is easier now. Like, I know my granny never worked [outside of the home] and my mother never worked all the time, but still they were always busy doing things. The only money my mother got when she wasn't working was when she was sewing. She had to do all her canning and the whole process just to get a little money. There are less worries now. I think now both the spouses work all day; before, just one would go out. (Interview #13)

I really cherish the way my grandmother used to live across the lake. They were isolated from everything, but they had everything they needed. There was no alcohol then; I think my mother was 30 before she started drinking. That was their life until they moved into Faust. . . . I think our generation today, there is no big difference, except for modern conveniences. Culture awareness was something that was always there with my mom; she decided to bring it back. She said this is what her mother was like. . . . I don't think the cultural generation gap has changed too much in my generation with myself and my family. I think with other families there has been too much of a gap. A lot of them don't know what Native culture is. (Interview #15)

I have a lot more rights, and I'm more aware of my rights. And I know that if I want to leave my husband, I have some education; I have something to fall back on. But I also don't have the support of the extended family that they did. So I have different kinds of support than they did. I can be a lot more independent too because of my education and because of my work—where I don't think back then there was very much work, especially in Wabasca. (Interview #16)

In Slave Lake here, they're doing a lot of the decision making. They're up front though. (Interview #17)

People were tougher; today it seems like they're getting weaker. Things are so easy today—at your beck and call. But years ago you had to work or you went without; you just got by. (Interview #19)

I'm still working [outside of the home], and I don't think my mom ever did. I have a lot of responsibilities now at my age that I don't think my mom ever did. And I think my mom

leaned a lot on her man. I think I changed where I became independent, and when I did lose him [her husband], it wasn't a real dramatic thing for me as I had a lot of the responsibilities anyway. My mom leaned on my dad and my step-dad; he made a lot of the decisions. With the extended family my mom was always there, and I don't think I was always there as I'm busy working myself. They can't just say, "You can go and stay at Grandma's," because maybe Grandma's not home. I won't let them expect me to be there as I work all week, and I enjoy my time off too. (Interview #21)

CHANGING TRADITIONS

34. When you grew up and moved away from your family's home, what kinds of things did you do differently from the way that your mother did?

I never grew up and moved away from my family's home; I took it [family] with me. But as far as the differences, I'm more open about sex and things like that. I see similarities with the way my grandma raised me because a lot of that I carried on. Like, I am "giving"—if there's one thing that I think about my grandma, it's her "giving" nature. I don't have it all, but I notice that what I have, I try to use. She was quite vocal in the home, and I think I am too. With me and my husband, there's no way I would sit back and let him make the decisions, because I think it's fifty-fifty. And it was that way at home, so I've learned that from her. . . . But she was more traditional than I am. There were certain things that you did and didn't do, like if there was a funeral, she would stay with the women just because it was expected, but at home she wasn't like that. And who knows what the other women were like at home either. . . . And sex was a big secret, something you had to hide. It wasn't something that was a part of life—and the same with menstruation. I was quite young when she died, so I don't know if she would have eventually talked to me about it and explained [it]. . . . She was happy to do things at home and happy to have her husband come home, where I am happy to be productive outside of the home. And I have more friends out in the community and all my activities are outside of the home, where she was sewing or baking or doing laundry in the home. (Interview #16)

35. Do you think that traditional knowledge is being undervalued? If so, how can it be changed?

I would say yes. There's more value to it than what is recognized. [It can be changed] by what we're doing now and everything else. I think that it will change. (Interview #14)

I think so. A lot of government societies don't understand what the traditional knowledge is. . . . They think it's a religious thing. In their viewpoint and from my experience, it isn't religious; it's the cultural being of who we are. . . . Religions only deal with limited areas; I think they undermine it. We need more people who are willing to go out and try to share in a positive, holistic way. I think they are always trying to involve it in the cross-cultural workshops. I think you need to go in there and do a Native workshop and keep it strictly Native and leave the other society. . . . From my point of view of the Creator and the Four Directions, we are always lending it. (Interview #15)

I don't think you can value something you don't know. So if I don't do it, does that mean I'm not valuing it? Because I was never taught traditional things. We lived kind of a semi-traditional lifestyle until I was ten, and then from then on it was in a White society and in

their world, and I had to fit in. So now when it's my choice in what I can do, if I want to be traditional or not traditional, I don't even know if I'd fit in. I'm almost in my own little world. . . . It [traditional knowledge] can be valued more so if it's taught . . . from the home. . . . And if it's something that's really believed in, . . . it's something that's got to be lived and taught. Also society has to value it because all society's opinions and attitudes reflect down on us, and a lot of times it changes your mind or steers your mind. (Interview #16)

It's so mixed up right now. I just did a workshop with the RCMP. . . . They couldn't say enough good things about it . . . [With some people] . . . there's a lot of fear. . . . [(Traditional knowledge can be valued more than it is now if] . . . you just work like we're working. You can only go where you are wanted. If somebody comes and asks you, then they'll open their door for you, but otherwise you can't go start preaching. It doesn't work [that way]. You have to work slowly; it's a very slow process. . . . It's something you don't tell people to do; they have to make up their own minds. You just have to be yourself—and some come slowly. It's coming. (Interview #17)

Sometimes I think it is and I think it could be changed even though they have it in their schools, but teachers that teach Native culture in the classroom have difficulty. It seems like it is put on the back burner all the time. . . . They have to make up their own curriculum to follow. . . . It creates a lot more work for the teachers. They also don't have a classroom especially for them; they have to keep switching. It seems like they are not a priority, like everybody else's class is more important than theirs. They have to start recognizing that it is important. . . . [But] you have to speak up so they can change it. . . . [In other areas] they're really starting to really recognize it. It seems like even on job competitions they usually ask if someone is into Native culture; then it is an asset. Even the Native people are starting to come out more than they used to. It used to be hidden. It was there when we were young, but they feared it. They never talked about it. . . . Now people are starting to come out now, even the healers. Now it's more wide open. (Interview #21)

I would say so. I think some of the more knowledgeable types and those who are willing to learn have to rely on some of the good things that were used in the past and bring them back and see if they can be used in the same manner—like respect and sound decision making that seems to be lacking in a lot of communities now. . . . It can be valued by the young people if they are willing to listen to the old knowledge that's still out there. And to ask questions of the older people to help them with things they're lacking—they don't ask enough questions. One dangerous part of this self-government thing is that people in some areas are in more of a dictatorship role, which would weaken the traditional values that could be used rather than to push people around and expect them to respond in a manner that would be effective. (Interview #22)

36. Do you think that your daughters or younger Native women have as much or more power and ability to make changes in the community as your mother or your grandmother did? Why or why not?

I think so; they are more outspoken than my mother. It is good as in my day men had more power. (Interview #8)

I think so. . . . They go to school and get the education; they understand. (Interview #10)

They have much more today. My mother or grandmother would have very little to say about anything that went on in the community. (Interview #14)

I think I have more power, and I say that because there's a lot more committees and things that I can be involved in, where she was limited. She was only heard in her circle of friends. And she didn't have the means to go beyond that, . . . where now we know exactly who to call and who to complain to if we have a problem. If we want change, we know how to get it. . . . Years ago, they'd call on somebody who was White, who was accepted [by the Native people], somebody who would know what to do. If my grandfather had something he needed to talk to somebody about, there was a White guy in the community who had been there for quite a while that he'd go and see. I remember other guys going to see him too. (Interview #16)

I think so, because I think Native people have more power now than in the past. They're not afraid now; they'll go further. Some of them are still afraid, but those are just individuals. (Interview #21)

I would say they could get enough power to be effective, but they have to be careful that they are not copying the White governments who have not been effective amongst Aboriginal peoples. They have to depend on people who are still around who have some experience with self-discipline and start working with them. You can't police all people; if they want to police somebody else, they should start policing themselves and use sound judgement that hopefully people will follow in a manner that is most effective. (Interview #22)

37. What kind of changes have happened in the community to make the position of your daughters' generation different than your parents' or grandparents' generation?

There's a lot more resources in the community, a lot more jobs, so there's a lot more stability. I know how education is really valued now, where back then it wasn't. Nowadays you have to have a degree and you have to have your Grade Twelve to get anywhere. And back then, it was hard work that got you somewhere. And I think a lot of people don't realize that and don't encourage school. So I think that's one of the major changes. I think we have a lot more influences from White people and TV. Mass media really influences the younger kids. They want what they can't have. (Interview #16)

I think they have to go back to the grandparents' generation in order to have a strong unit today. Natives have to help themselves. . . . Even if you have the best education, BSWs, if you don't work from the heart and caring and working with love, then you can't give them nothing. Our young teenagers are starving for love and attention, being that the whole system has changed. Mothers are working; they're never home. And if we don't nourish the kids, they're in trouble because they go looking for it in a different way. (Interview #17)

They have seen others like even me and maybe other Native people working at things and seeing results because we went out there and we fought for things. Like, even years ago when they were going to start this one housing program that was coming in, one of the leaders in town then—it was a Native woman who was a leader—who gave us the information. She wasn't really supposed to, and she couldn't do it herself because she was working for the organization, and she knew this money would be open for it. Some of us

worked on it, and we had to go to the town to get permission to do it and to even work on it. We brought it to town and we had to fight for it because the town wasn't really accepting it. They said it would be another welfare ghetto; they didn't want that. And we really had to convince them that we were trying to help the people, say for low income families who were interested in buying their own house. Some of them were living in low rental, and they needed to go a step further to be able to buy their homes. . . . We got the housing and a lot of people did buy our houses. We really had to fight, and I think kids seeing that, seeing their moms getting that result, was a good role model. It helped my kids as they see you fighting for things, and they are going to go out and do the same thing. (Interview #21)

I'll use Slave Lake as an example because that's where I was born, and I've watched things that have been going on there for the past twenty years. I see a lot of our Native women working for governments and establishments relating to government, and they're certainly getting some sort of training . . . on how decisions have to be made relating to economics. I think they do quite well in the work force. But on the other hand, I see a weakness in the family tradition of close-knit families with more decisions that relate to discipline, to job possibilities. Everything in general is not as close knit as it used to be. (Interview #22)

38. What are some of the issues that families deal with today?

There's still a lot of racism in some communities. Probably not being able to cope with their problems and turning to alcohol, violence, things like that. I don't think racism is a problem here; some talk about it more in the urban areas and in the south, so there must be quite a bit. (Interview #13)

A lot of the Native women are faced with a lot of the same issues in the surrounding areas. As they are involved with alcoholism and drugs, they still put up with all of those things—abuse—some of them from their own kids. They [the kids] beat them up. . . . I think the issues are still around, especially physical abuse. It is quite accepted and they don't want to talk about it. (Interview #15)

Dysfunctionalism like alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual abuse, single-parent families, low-income families, all those things contribute to poor family relations, the breakdown in the family. (Interview #16)

Abuse and lack of parental guidance; the children are not listening to their parents. They are rude to them. These kids are growing up so fast. They're teenagers at nine, ten, eleven. (Interview #19)

They deal with alcoholism, and sometimes they're forced to deal with it if it is in the family. A lot of times child welfare gets involved and they are forced to do something about it; . . . they have to do something about it when their children are taken away. Years ago child welfare wasn't always there. I guess it was, but people weren't so aware of it so there was less of it. Now they will deal with alcoholism and they will deal with child neglect, violence in the family. There are places to go now to help you deal with those kinds of things. (Interview #21)

39. How do you think families have changed?

[They] try to follow the traditional ways. (Interview #9)

Again, alcoholism, family abuse, drug abuse. Communication from the younger generation to the older generations. We need this so much. They don't understand each other. All

three generations need to come together. It is our generation that is doing the work between them, trying to heal them and building the bridge. We are doing something and that is good. I think [Native families] are beginning to accept the Native culture. A lot of them who are following that road and have sobered up have found it very powerful. I think we need more of that. . . . The older generation who started drinking have stopped, and the younger generation have only just started—seeing the older ones. And then there is our generation in the middle who decide to avoid it. With me, teaching my grandchildren the cultural ways—if you follow them one hundred per cent, you don't need all these other influences, like drugs and alcohol. You find your well-being in yourself. (Interview #15)

I think they have changed for the positive and sometimes for the negative. I think for the positive, families are realizing the dysfunctionalism and are trying to do something about it. And for the negative part, there's a lot more happening now to younger kids like peer pressure, drug abuse and teen pregnancies—things that kids don't know how to handle and are being forced to. (Interview #16)

Well, when I was growing up there was no such thing as babysitters. Mom never hired a babysitter except when she went to have a baby herself. Mom never went out to work. She never went out to functions. She always stayed home; she was always there. And I think that is one of the biggest changes. I think that's where a lot of child neglect comes in because the kids are free to do what they want because the parents are not always there. My dad used to go out, but my mom never left us. Another thing nowadays, because so many women work, there isn't as much extended family as there used to be years ago. The grandmother isn't always there to be with her grandchildren like she used to be. . . . And even the men helping at home is a difference. Years ago they wouldn't. It was very few who would ever do any housework. . . . The men were the breadwinners. When we were kids Dad used to do a lot of hunting, and that's how we divided our food, and with a lot of gardening. . . . You don't have to do as much for survival now, as years ago because there was no such thing as welfare. You fend for yourself or you'd starve to death. . . . There is a lot more divorces, because they don't have to stay there any more if they don't want to. They have a lot more choices than they used to years ago. . . . A lot of it was the church that kept them there. (Interview #21)

40. In what ways are women important in the everyday life of your community today?

They know how to talk now, not like years ago. You've got to have education. [In the old days] some of the women were very important, like my aunt. No matter what time of the night or morning, if she heard someone was going to have a baby, she'd be right there. It's not only that; she'd make her own roots and stuff. (Interview #9)

I think in all ways; you have to be involved in all the issues . . . I think today as Native women in the community, more and more of us are getting educated, and more and more of us are becoming the leaders of other Native people who are not educated. They feel comfortable in coming to you. We are going to be the stronghold of our communities. It is coming to a full circle for Native women. (Interview #15)

They are the givers of life, and because they have wisdom. I just think of "Mother Earth" as woman. They are the nurturers and the ones that you go home to. (Interview #16)

In Slave Lake here, they're doing a lot of the decision making. They're up front though. (Interview #17)

A mother is the centre of the whole family. I don't think that is ever going to change. We're supposed to be the heart of the family. . . . [In the past] a woman was the heart of the family in the home, but on the outside she'd say [to her husband], "Well, you are the breadwinner, so you be the spokesman." Actually, I think they were sharing in the inside, but the men maybe were the spokesmen. But women definitely played a part; they had to. Even today women can play a part. (Interview #19)

Women were always important anyway and will always be important because they raise a bunch of kids. (Interview #20)

A lot of them are employed in the agencies, like housing, social services, child welfare, and in the stores or anywhere. (Interview #21)

I think women are important in making quicker decisions in dealing with family problems. I think when the younger generation get in trouble, women have quicker reactions to deal with them, and they're the first ones who will mention to the general public what has to be done. . . . I think men have a tendency to wait too long and almost have to wait until somebody's injured before they do something. . . . I also think there's a trend right now from the top in politics in the last five years both federally and provincially where women seem to be valued for their leadership qualities, and I think that is good. Going back to the tradition of Native people in communities, the most powerful leaders in those days were the women because they weren't afraid to make a decision, . . . and they were right about what they stood up for. (Interview #22)

APPENDIX B: LESSER SLAVE LAKE

ABORIGINAL ORAL HISTORY

Original paintings of
Mary Louise Beaver , "Kohkom" 1987
Alphonse Beaver , "Moshom" 1989
by Dale Auger

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following individuals for their contribution toward this project: Sam Sinclair for interviewing, translating, and sharing his stories; Edna Sinclair for accompanying us up north, being supportive of this initiative and for the courage to tell her story; Damon Kapatch for taking the time to record, transcribe, and listen to the elders; Gordon and Valerie Sinclair for their participation and assistance; Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk for helping duplicate tapes; Lorraine Sinclair for her photography expertise; Linda Anderson for transcribing; Jackson Anderson for photography reproduction; Jane Martin and Tracey Cooper for their administrative assistance; Dale Auger for providing the art work of "Kohkom" and Moshom"; Monika McNabb for her patience; Michael Asch for his belief in me; and David Kukkola for his ongoing support and encouragement.

Most important, thank you to all of the elders who were so willing to share their stories (in alphabetical order):

Francois Auger
John Auger
Alphonse Beaver
Mary Louise Bellam
John Bellerose
Melanie Bottle
Rose Cardinal
Ned Gladue
Delphine Houle
John Houle
Bob Kreutzer
Ben Norberg
Edna Sinclair
Sam Sinclair

I am especially grateful to the funders of this project:

- Alberta Historical Resources Foundation and its sponsor, Alberta Lotteries
- Aboriginal Affairs
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples provided funding for the 1993 interviews

I would also like to acknowledge the letters of support from the following individuals in the early stages of the project: Pearl Calahasen, MLA, Lesser Slave Lake Constituency; Chris Armstrong-Esther, University of Lethbridge; Richard Price, University of Alberta; Vina Auger, Lesser Slave Lake Indigenous Society; and Francois Prevost, Lesser Slave Lake Historical Society.

Jeannette Sinclair
Project Coordinator
November 1998

PREFACE

This project was undertaken in an effort to capture historical knowledge of the indigenous people in the Lesser Slave Lake area. It was also intended as a means to promote cross-cultural understanding of Aboriginal culture and traditions through public awareness. This is not to be considered a comprehensive in-depth oral historical document, but a "vehicle" for elders to share their stories. I hope that we have not misunderstood or misrepresented their words in the translation from Cree to English or from the oral tradition to the written word.

It is also my hope that this project will motivate others to spend time with the elders in their communities, in their families, to record and preserve their knowledge. When our elders pass on, their knowledge goes with them. Only our memories of them remain. It shows respect for our elders, to ask them to share their stories, to take the time to listen to them and to be genuinely interested in their life experiences. This project allowed me the opportunity to learn some lessons, some of them, the hard way. I learned that we should not wait for the "perfect time" to do things since the elders may pass on before that "perfect time" arrives.

One of the elders was 107 years of age at the time I met her in 1994. She lived on her own with her great-granddaughter who was about 11 years old. Her memory was still very good. She consented to spend time with me and allow her words to be tape-recorded the next time I was up in that community. I never made the time to go back up north to do it before she passed away. I let my daily work, family responsibilities and other seemingly important obligations take priority instead of going north to interview her even though she was expecting me to return. She was very healthy and active when I met her. I foolishly took for granted that she would stay that way. I cried when I found out she passed away. I still deeply regret the missed opportunity to capture even some of the knowledge she was prepared to share, even though she humbly said that she didn't know too much about what is happening today. But she knew a lot about the past. Anyone that lives over a century has a wealth of knowledge that most people would be honoured to hear. That experience will always serve as a reminder not to let other things take precedence over time being spent with our elders.

It does not take a lot of time or resources to sit and listen with a tape recorder to capture the stories—to photograph them if they give you their permission. In my experience, the elders are honoured when you are genuinely interested in them. And they are very appreciative when you provide them with an honoraria and/or gifts for their time, when you send or bring them audio-tapes and written copies of their interviews, copies of any photographs taken and then finally, a copy of the complete document.

I also learned not to overlook the elders who are members of your immediate or extended family. That was advice given to me by author, Maria Campbell, who told me in the early stages of this project to begin with my parents—with my family. Although I did not start with them, I did ask my father to be the interviewer and translator. Other family members became involved as necessary along the way. I interviewed my parents in the final stages of this project. It was an emotional and very rewarding experience for me to listening to their stories. Although this project was more time-consuming than expected, it was a very worthwhile and educational experience. I hope that others find it to be of some interest even if it just serves to motivate people to do their own oral histories.

SYNOPSIS

Purpose and Objectives

Prior to the mid-1960s, very little written material existed about the history of the Lesser Slave Lake area, apart from journals written from the perspectives of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Oblates and the explorers of the Northwest. Therefore, existing historical records reveal a past based on predominantly European values and belief systems. These versions of history depict some of the social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions of the time. However, without the Aboriginal perspective of the indigenous people, the historical knowledge of the area is incomplete. The focus of this project is the Lesser Slave Lake area, the homeland of the Cree.

Historical documents such as Baergen's thesis, *The Fur Trade at Lesser Slave Lake*, and Sawyer's thesis, *A History of Lesser Slave Lake*, provide useful information of local history prior to the nineteenth century. Babcock's unpublished document, *Lesser Slave Lake: A Regional History* captures much of the rich past of the First Nations in the area, and later of the Métis. Local publications, such as *Sodbusters* and *The Pioneers of the Lakeland*, also contribute significantly to the local recent history. This project is not to take away from what has already been written but to complement it with a stronger Aboriginal voice.

Aboriginal history and culture among most indigenous peoples' is passed down from generation to generation in oral tradition. Unfortunately, the result is a dearth of indigenous historical records in written form. And since historical literature is accepted by North American standards as the historical "truth," orally transmitted stories become secondary in status to the written word. Yet among Aboriginal peoples, the oral stories passed down from our ancestors is our history.

Unfortunately, with the decreased use of indigenous languages among many Aboriginal people, the oral transmission of traditional knowledge becomes difficult without the fluency of Native language speakers. In the process of translating indigenous knowledge to the English language, the meaning of some of the words and stories cannot be adequately represented. Although the majority of the elders interviewed for this project were Cree speakers, their stories had to be translated so they could be shared in English. The main purpose of this project was to obtain oral histories primarily from the Aboriginal community in the Lesser Slave Lake area to preserve Aboriginal knowledge, and to provide a more well-rounded perspective of local history through public awareness.

Methodology

The method of obtaining oral historical knowledge was through interviewing Cree elders in the Lesser Slave Lake area. Two non-Aboriginal individuals were interviewed as well since they lived in the area most of their lives. They know the people in the community and the Native way of life. Sadly, one of those individuals is now deceased. The main interviewer, Sam Sinclair, is a Cree speaker and is well known by the Native people in the Lesser Slave Lake area. He also provided the translation of the interviews from Cree to English.

Although the interviews were largely unstructured, an interview framework was provided and is included as Appendix A. It was intended that the interviews be conducted in an informal way, like a visit with them, rather than using a structured format. Copies of archival photographs of the Lesser Slave Lake area were used for only one interview, therefore, they have not been included with this document.

The original intent in conducting the interviews was to use reel-to-reel tape recorders to meet archival standards. However, that became too difficult to do. Instead, we used a cassette recorder (Marantz PM221) with a "table top" microphone (Shure 809) to ensure that all the voices in the room would be picked up. For some of the interviews, the built in microphone was used. Most of the interviews were recorded on ninety-minute anti-resonance audio-cassettes (high bias/CrO_2) to maintain high quality sound. The tapes were duplicated on Normal position audio-cassettes since that is the standard quality for commercial duplication recording. The tapes were transcribed using a dictating/transcribing system (Memo-Scriber TRC-8800).

Most of the interviews were conducted in 1996. Two of the elders were interviewed a second time in 1998 to supplement their original interviews—one is ninety-eight—the other is eighty-eight. Another two elders were interviewed in 1993 for a different project funded by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and were interviewed for this project in 1996. The earlier interviews are included since they involved the same elders, but the nature of the interviews were different. Those elders are ninety-six and the other is in his eighties. All the photographs were done in 1998. The majority of them were taken by the project coordinator using a 35 mm camera (Nikon EM) using colour print film.

Copies of the tapes were returned to the elders with a hard copy of their interviews for feedback on the accuracy of the material. For interviews conducted in Cree, both the Cree and English versions were given back to the elders. Photographs were taken during the final stages of the project and were also sent to them. All the participants will receive a copy of the final version of this document.

A set of twenty-four audio-tapes will remain with the main funder, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation for archival preservation. The list of audio-taped interviews is included as Appendix B. Another set is for the appropriate local historical facility. The English translations are included with the Cree interviews. Copies of the interviews are included with this document.

Summary

Fourteen elders were interviewed in total. Most of them were from the Lesser Slave Lake area or lived there for some time. One elder is from Sandy Lake about 130 km north of the town of Slave Lake; two are from the neighbouring community, Wabasca/Desmarais. Another lives in Widewater, on the south side of Lesser Slave Lake. Two are from Calling Lake but have lived in Slave Lake. Two were born and raised in the area but now reside in Edmonton. The remainder live in Slave Lake.

The age range of the elders is from seventy-two to ninety-eight years of age. The eldest person, Mr. Alphonse Beaver, is from Sandy Lake. His son, Francis, who lives next door to him, helped with the interview since he is hard of hearing. Mr. Beaver, lives on his own and was still trapping until recently. He wants to get back to it when he can. He

mentioned that his eyesight is failing and he wanted to have his eyes tested so he could get glasses. He talked about his knowledge of making birch bark canoes which he learned from his father when he was about five years old. He is still in very good health and has a really good attitude and outlook on life. The artwork for the cover of this document is of Alphonse Beaver and his wife, Mary Louise, who is now deceased. He talked with such love and respect for his wife of sixty-two years. He had a very difficult time when she passed on about thirteen years ago. It was an honour spending time with Mr. Beaver and his son, Francis. The only disappointment that I had, is that I am not a Cree speaker and could not be an active participant during the interview.

The next eldest woman interviewed, Mrs. Melanie Bottle, is ninety-six years of age. She lives in Slave Lake at a senior's lodge. She is in good health although she has been in a wheelchair for several years now. She is a talented seamstress and is still making very good quality items. She gave my mother and I each a beautiful cushion that she made. One wall in her room is covered with photographs of her family with picture frames that she made. I previously interviewed her in 1993 for a project for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Those interviews are included to supplement the one that was done with her in 1996. She knows my mother and father well and was happy that we spent time with her. We look forward to seeing her again soon.

The next eldest individual interviewed is Mary Louise Bellam. She lives on her own in Widewater next to her grandson. She is eighty-eight years of age and is also in really good health. She looks young for her age. Like Mr. Beaver, she has a healthy diet of natural foods, wild meat, fish, vegetables, and fruit. She still makes dry meat on the racks outside her home which is a pretty strenuous task for many people who are much younger in age. She also has a really good attitude. And again, like Mr. Beaver, attributes her good health to her spiritual beliefs and daily prayers.

The next eldest man, who is in his eighties is Ned Gladue. The age on his birth certificate differs from the age he believes he is. He speaks English quite well—the previously mentioned elders spoke only Cree. Ned has a lot of knowledge of the local history since he lived with his family in the area known as Sawridge, which was where the townsite was previously located. He lives in one of the local senior's lodges. Up until very recently he was still driving his vehicle, but now that his sight is failing, he has had to give up driving. He is still active and in good health. I interviewed him in 1993 and included that interview with this project as well.

The remaining elders are in their seventies and provided useful information about the way of life in which they were raised. Their discussions ranged from their traditional way of life including food, clothing, shelter, transportation, language, health care, education, economy, spiritual and religious beliefs, Aboriginal status, social structure and Euro-Canadian influences. With the exception of the two non-Aboriginal elders, and my mother, who was raised with both languages since her mother spoke Cree and her father spoke English, the rest were primarily first language Cree speakers. Many of them speak English fluently but some prefer to speak Cree whenever possible.

It has been my experience that the elders want to share their knowledge to ensure that the culture is preserved and passed down to future generations. In addition, it allows them the opportunity to discuss the lifestyles of their early years including the contributions that they made in the development of their communities—their legacy.

Mr. Francois Auger

&

Mrs. Rose Cardinal

Francois Auger and
Rose Cardinal

Calling Lake, Alberta

October 1998

(Photo by Lorraine Sinclair)

Interview of Francois Auger in Cree and English
Calling Lake, Alberta
Interviewed by Sam Sinclair
Translated and summarized by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 1996

Francois Auger grew up in a mission located in Desmarais. He was three years old when he was first placed in the mission. He also spent much of his youth with his grandparents. He always remembers having food to eat, most of which was moose meat. Later, his grandfather George Auger died and his grandmother stayed with a new man named John Houle. Mr. Houle also helped raise Francois during the late '30s and early '40s.

Francois lived in a place southeast of Desmarais called Horse Creek. They maintained a garden and so they always had fresh vegetables. The vegetables were stored and preserved in a root cellar. They also always had fresh fish from the lake which they sometimes dried and pounded. The area in which they lived also was abundant with moose and other game. This provided most of the nourishment for Francois and his family. Mr. Auger also spent time trapping many different types of animals in the area. In the spring, Francois remembers collecting the eggs of mud hens. These eggs were collected by the hundreds and then cooled in the permafrost found beneath muskeg. This was an effective storage space for eggs as well as most other types of food. Berries were also picked and canned for later use. Strawberries were the first to appear followed by saskatoons, raspberries, blueberries and cranberries.

"Indian molasses" was another treat enjoyed by Francois and his family. It was made by draining the sap from a birch tree in the spring. It was then thoroughly boiled and eaten as a dessert with bannock. The molasses was sometimes canned in a sealer to be eaten at a later date.

Francois also talked about eating cat-tails and bulrushes. Certain parts of these plants were edible and these were utilized by Francois and his family.

When Mr. Auger went hunting there was very little waste. Any animal (usually moose) that was killed was cleaned as soon as possible and was usually moved to a central location using pack horses. Wagons were also used if they were available. Many parts of the animals were smoked including the bones. The marrow was taken out of the bones and mixed with pounded meat. This was a delicacy to many people of the area. Francois also remembers his grandmother cooking the hoof of the moose and eating the area around the ankle. If a moose was killed in the summertime, the velvet was taken off the horns and was also utilized for food. Even parts of the intestine and stomach lining were boiled and eaten. Bear was also used for food as well as for the warm layer of fur.

Horses were a main source of transportation for Mr. Auger. Canoes were also a popular form of transport. Francois' grandfather used to make his own birch bark canoes. Some of these canoes were covered in canvas and soaked with oil for protection.

Log cabins were a popular form of shelter in the Desmarais area. Teepees were also used a lot in the summer months. Shady resting areas were also made by leaning young poplar with leaves still attached against other sturdy poles.

Mr. Auger's first language was Cree. He also learned a fair bit of French from the mission. His grandfather, Mr. Houle, also spoke some French to Francois.

Mr. Houle was a talented man and was well known for his fiddle playing ability. In 1941, Mr. Houle worked in a sawmill with our interviewer, Mr. Sam Sinclair. Mr. Houle was a jolly man who was physically strong even into his sixties. He carried a medicine bag and was known to help many people with the medicines that he had. In those days it was very common for people to help others in need.

Francois' stepfather took part in the first World War. He remembers stories of the poison gas that was used and how it killed many innocent people in 1918. Discipline was also important in that time and was more prevalent than in recent times. Younger people were taught to respect the older people in the community.

The first hospital was built in the Wabasca area in the late 1920s. The nurse from the Catholic mission was in charge of the hospital. It helped many sick people as there was nowhere else to go at that time.

Most of Mr. Auger's education was obtained from the mission. He started grade one when he was ten years old. He later upgraded his skills and eventually taught at the Alberta Opportunity Company.

Francois attended events where Indian songs were practiced. He remembers that his grandparents were both good singers and knew many songs. He never learned many of the songs himself. Many of these songs held special significance and were very spiritual in meaning.

Storytelling was a popular pastime in Francois' youth. Many were fictional stories but all of them were entertaining as the old storytellers had their own unique style. Humour was a main focus of these stories which were told in Cree. Some of the mythical characters involved in these stories were named *Wisakecahk* and *Wihtiko*. Other stories involved funny incidents that happened in the Desmarais area. Other stories were said to be true and sometimes these stories were quite unusual. Some men were said to know the whereabouts of moose and other animals. One man named, Quintel, had powers like an animal and sometimes disappeared for months at a time.

Mr. Auger worked for sawmills in his earlier days. He started working when he was fourteen years of age. Most of the work was done with hand saws until power saws were introduced in later years. Horses were also used to help fall trees in the earlier years. There was a lot of work available especially after World War II. Welfare was not common at all but in 1937, clothes were given out to all the school children. These clothes were orange and for a while everybody was dressed in these colours.

Francois also spent a lot of time commercial fishing. Wabasca Lake, Calling Lake and Slave Lake were some of the lakes that he fished the most. He also worked with the farmers helping them with thrashing and stooking. The work was hard with little pay but work was available to anyone with a strong work ethic.

Mr. Auger was raised Catholic in the mission but he also remembers praying with other Indians in a more traditional manner. He has a deep respect for the older traditional ways but he also understands the Catholic form of religion. He also remembers the tradition of hanging the bones of the deceased loved ones and moving them with the camps. This practice is a lot like that of the Carrier Indians of British Colombia. He also

notes that there were a lot of people who were buried in small unmarked graves. He hopes that their burial sites will be more properly recognized in the future.

Francois was born a Treaty Indian and he always respected those rights. He remembers the treaty days where he was given five dollars annually. That was the only time he could afford luxuries like a five cent orange. Eventually, Francois was told he was no longer a Treaty Indian. This took place in the early 1940s. Mr. Auger said that he continued living off the land and that little changed for him. One of the things that did change was his need for a hunting license. Despite such inconveniences Francois continued to live the life of a Métis male.

Mr. Auger's stepfather was in the First World War. He lived into his late nineties and died just a few years ago. His mother is still living and is in her late eighties. She lives in a senior's hospital in Athabasca. Francois also has a half brother who was in Korea during the Second World War.

Francois' stepfather was named Edward Auger. He apparently owned land in the Calling Lake area. The land rights were later taken from the Auger family. Thirty years ago Francois was also promised land in the Calling Lake area. He belonged to a Moccasin Co-op and was promised land for twenty-five years. This deal never did materialize and Francois spent much of his time working in other areas.

In summary, Mr. Auger lived a good life filled with many accomplishments. He is a hard worker and he is respected in the community. We thanked Mr. Francois Auger for his time and we appreciate all of the information that he has shared with us.

Interview of Rose Cardinal
Calling Lake, Alberta
Interviewed by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 20, 1996

Sam: "What types of clothes were popular when you were growing up?"
Rose: "Moccasins, moosehide gloves. A few people would wear moosehide jackets."
Sam: "What year?"
Rose: "I can remember about the time when I was eight years old. Before then I can remember lots but now and then, you know."
Sam: "Is this around the 1930s?"
Rose: "Ya, about 1930. I'll talk about from 1930. Before that I can remember off and on. Clothes we had, like materials, dresses. Women never wore pants in those days. They used to wear dresses. No slacks. They had mostly straight hair with a tam on top of their head. That was the style. Going to church, everybody had to wear a hat. Women, children, girls not boys. Men would sit on one side of the church and women would sit on the other side. Always like that."
Sam: "That was the old style."
Rose: "I went to the mission when I was eight years old. That was in the '30s. But I didn't stay too long. It was a Catholic mission in Wabasca. I only stayed for three years because my mother had her grandmother who was blind and when she was doing something outside somebody had to be with my great grandma. So I was the one to be with my great grandma."
Sam: "What was your great grandma, what was her last name?"
Rose: "Gladue. Before she got married she was a Gladue. Then she married a Brule. Her husband was a Brule."
Sam: "That was your great grandfather."
Rose: "Ya, but I never got to see him."
Sam: "What was the main source of food in those days?"
Rose: "Lots of vegetables. My father used to have a real big garden. Lots of berries. My mother used to can."
Sam: "You guys used to pick them?"
Rose: "Oh ya, and rhubarb. We always had a cellar full of vegetables and then meat once in a while. My brother, as I can remember, my brother Joe was always hunting. My brother Harry did too."
Sam: "Was there a lot of game in those days?"
Rose: "Oh yes but you had to go quite a ways, far away. That's in Wabasca. Horseback, my brother used to go. Snared for rabbits. Fish, ducks, partridges, everything like that. My mother used to set her net a long time ago."
Sam: "Did you have any agriculture stuff, did you have any cattle?"
Rose: "Oh yes. Mostly people had to have horses. We had cows."
Sam: "Did you have any large amount of cattle?"
Rose: "No. The most we had was six. We had four milking cows but that was when we moved to Slave Lake. I can remember the most milking cows we had was four.

That was in 1941. I got married when I was only sixteen. In 1938, I got married. I had my oldest son in 1939. Eugene. Then in 1941, we moved to Slave Lake."

Sam: "I remember when you people come."

Rose: "We camped next to your place at the Old Town. Close to Mrs. Bottle. That's where Mike was born. At the Old Town, July 17, 1941."

Sam: "Did you used to tan hides?"

Rose: "Oh yes, we did."

Sam: "Did you ever sell moccasins?"

Rose: "Those days, I don't think so. I don't think we ever sold anything that time. That's where I learned everything was from my mother but mostly she'd make it for family."

Sam: "By travel, it says here was it by foot, snowshoe, horseback, wagon, scows, canoes, toboggans."

Rose: "'*Moya*. This I should have mentioned before. My father, when he came from St. Albert he finished his grade twelve. Those days not too many people finished their grade twelve. His uncle Johnny McGilvry was already working at Chipewyan Lakes, working at the store. My father finished his grade twelve so my uncle went to visit his sister, my dad's mother in St. Albert. That was Annie Logan. He brought my father back to come and work at Chipewyan Lakes at the Hudson Bay. He was only eighteen years old. Then he worked there and he used to tell us he didn't understand a word of Cree. But those days people didn't understand English, way up north. Nobody talked English. His uncle Johnny McGilvry used to talk good Cree My father said in one month he could talk Cree already because nobody talked English just Cree In those days when you went to the store you stood by the counter. You have to ask for what you want. You don't go around shopping. Like now, today you go around and pick what you want. In no time he said he could understand everything. Then he worked there. In summertime he would come back when the stores closed after trapping. He'd come to Wabasca and work at the store in Wabasca."

Sam: "Your dad was named Bob."

Rose: "Bob Logan. Robert Logan was my dad."

Sam: "I remember him."

Rose: "His cousins were Simon McGilvry. His mother was a McGilvry, my dad's mother was a McGilvry."

Sam: "This Johnny McGilvry was Simon's dad?"

Rose: "Ya. That's Simon's dad."

Sam: "Wasn't he Treaty?"

Rose: "I don't think so."

Sam: "Someplace he belonged to Treaty. Lubicon Lake, he was Treaty over there."

Rose: "Sounds good. So I could be a Treaty. Mike is working on it. All my kids are Treaty and some grandchildren are Treaty but not me. I'm the only one that's not a Treaty."

Sam: "In the olden days when you were in Wabasca what did you live in: a house, cabin, any teepees involved?"

Rose: "Oh yes, we always had a teepee outside our house. A tent and a teepee. We always lived in the house though."

Sam: "You travelled by horseback and wagon?"

Rose: "Yes, and walking. People used to walk most of the time."

Sam: "Did your dad have a canoe?"

Rose: "Oh yes, we always had a canoe. Not a motorboat, just a canoe."

Sam: "What about toboggans and dog teams in the winter?"

Rose: "Ya, we always had them. My dad used to make toboggans he used to make snowshoes. He used to make some things for himself like that. Furniture he used to make. Wooden chairs, tables. Just for our own use."

Sam: "Now, language. What was your first language?"

Rose: "Cree."

Sam: "English was your next language?"

Rose: "Ya. My father always talked to us in English and Cree but he always told us to try and use our Cree, to be proud of it. He was proud of it. Our children all talk Cree."

Sam: "We made a slip up. My wife and I didn't talk Cree enough to teach our kids. We were always dealing with somebody who didn't speak Cree. It says high Cree here. I can't understand what they mean by high Cree. To me some of the best Cree I've heard in Canada is right here in Wabasca. This general area. Now there's a mixed language, Cree and French. You didn't use that."

Rose: "No."

Sam: "Cree place names. Did you remember dealing with a lot of Cree names? Grasshead that was *Mahskikisiwan*."

Rose: "Ya *Mahskikisiwan*. My great grandmother, the one I was talking about who was blind. People used to call her *Kiswipayîs*."

Sam: "Health care."

Rose: "More like in my family, like my parents. Indian medicine."

Sam: "Did you depend on somebody else that knew Indian medicine?" Rose: "Ya. My grandfather used to tell me a lot of things."

Sam: "He knew about herbs?"

Rose: "Oh yes, everything."

Sam: "Do you remember if there were any serious sickness in your young days? Small pox or diphtheria or anything?"

Rose: "Not really."

Sam: "There was no hospital in Wabasca?"

Rose: "There used to be. All my time there used to be a hospital in Wabasca."

Sam: "Was there a doctor?"

Rose: "No, just a nurse. I think a doctor used to come once a month."

Sam: "You don't remember if it was Dr. Belanger? He used to be in High Prairie for years."

Rose: "There used to be one, especially in springtime when a doctor used to come for tonsils."

Sam: "Did you ever learn to sing in Cree?"

Rose: "No."

Sam: "What about storytelling?"

Rose: "I used to do a lot of that before we had television, with my kids, I used to have a whole bunch of children coming from all over. Everyday they'd come and ask me if I was going to tell stories tonight. Lots of kids used to come to our place here when my kids were small. I'd tell them stories."

Sam: "True stories?"

Rose: "Sometimes. I had learned lots of stories from old people. My grandmother's second husband, old Benjamin Cardinal would tell oldtime stories. I used to learn a lot from him. Now, since the TV came it took everything away from us. The kids would sit there and listen to the TV instead of stories. When I learned the stories it used to be all Cree. It's so hard to translate them to English. Nobody understands Cree anymore. Once in a while I go to the school. The girls ask me to come tell stories to the kids. But it's different, I have to tell them in English."

Sam: "Do you remember the stories about *Wisahkicak*?"

Rose: "Yes, always. All the time. I used to tell stories like that."

Sam: "You didn't hear any stories when you went to school in the mission?"

Rose: "No. Religion. We prayed most of the time. No stories not even in the classroom. It was different."

Sam: "When you're talking about the '30s, there wasn't much work then?"

Rose: "No."

Sam: "Your dad used to work in a store as a young man?"

Rose: "Wabasca and Desmarais. In the summertime when the store was closed, he would work at the mission. He always worked. There's one thing I never understand was when they talked about the 'hungry '30s'. We always had food and four cows to milk. When I think back people used to come to us for milk and other things. They'd come for fish and things like that. My father was always working at the mission in the summertime, full time worker. In the springtime he used to go to Wabasca to get some groceries."

Sam: "When you say 'go to Wabasca,' you mean from Desmarais?"

Rose: "That's a long ways."

Sam: "To walk."

Rose: "No, he'd use his horses. When my father was going to Slave Lake to visit his uncle Jimmy Norris, these are his relatives but I don't know how. I know Belaharkis (?) and them were his cousins. His mother's side were cousins. That time when we moved from Wabasca to Slave Lake my father came to Slave Lake. He came alone with a team of horses to get some food. He wanted to visit his relatives. That summer, my father always had a big garden. We planted lots of garden but then a big wind would come and blow away all the garden seeds. Nothing was growing. When he went to Slave Lake he came back and said "I think we should go to Slave Lake for a couple of months to go try it out there." That was in 1941. He never brought any food. He just came back. He started giving away the cows. We didn't even sell the cows, we had quite a few horses. We just left them but we were only going for a couple of months. We left our house. We took one cow with us, a calf and a cow."

Sam: "Where did you used to live in Desmarais?"

Rose: "Where you cross the bridge. There's two bridges, the old bridge and the new bridge coming from Slave Lake. That old bridge across there."

Sam: "About where the garages are?"

Rose: "About there. Ya, that's where we used to live?"

Sam: "Bissell lives there too."

Rose: "Ya close there on this side of Bissell. We had a nice house. That used to be Sam Johnston's house."

Sam: "He didn't hunt and trap too much, your dad?"

Rose: "No, not very much."

Sam: "Did he do any fishing and gathering."

Rose: "Oh yes. We did that, but not my father. Those days there was six days of working. He just had that Sunday off. We'd go to church."

Sam: "You used some of the land for gardening?"

Rose: "Ya."

Sam: "He never was involved in logging, sawmills?"

Rose: "Not until we moved to Slave Lake."

Sam: "Did he ever do any fire-fighting?"

Rose: "Ya, a little bit before we moved, when there was a real big fire before we moved from Wabasca. More like he was hauling food for firefighters."

Sam: "Oil and gas industry, you never got involved with that?"

Rose: "No."

Sam: "Spiritual and religious beliefs. Do you believe in spirituality?"

Rose: "I do."

Sam: "You were Catholic? Both your parents went to church?"

Rose: "My father came as a Protestant when he came to Wabasca. I was baptized Protestant when I was born. My mother was always a Catholic. My father got baptized as a Catholic before he got married to my mother. My mother's maiden name was Decoines, like Decoines in Slave Lake. That was her relatives. Moises Decoines was my grandfather's brother."

Sam: "Burial practices. They had regular graveyards in Wabasca. You people were never involved in gravesites in the bush?"

Rose: "No."

Sam: "Aboriginal status and identity. What were you: Indian status, Half-breed status or Métis status?"

Rose: "My father came from Scotland. His father was a Scotchman. His mother was Irish."

Sam: "How did that affect your family? No hard feelings between Treaties and non-Treaties. They're all friends, eh?"

Rose: "Ya, they're very proud to be Treaties, my kids."

Sam: "It doesn't change you as a person. If you were a good worker, you stayed a good worker. If you're lazy, you're lazy. That's all there is to it in my books. In my case, I wish we were Treaty when I first got married, for hunting. That's the thing I cherish the most and also the educational help it done for my children and grandchildren. Has it helped you in any way."

Rose: "Oh yes it does help. My grandchildren are going to university. Like Linda's three kids, they're Treaties. They're all going to university. The oldest boy is finishing in April. The other one has one year to go. Her youngest daughter is still going to Sunrise. My daughter's waiting to go as well."

Sam: "Fur trade. Did your dad buy fur?"

Rose: "Oh yes, a lot of it."

Sam: "He bought a lot of fur for Hudson Bay. The local trading posts were in Wabasca, Desmarais and Fort Chipewyan. No reserves were involved?"

Rose: "Well, he used to like Treaty time."

Sam: "So your dad was an interpreter in Treaty days?"

Rose: "Ya. Always, family allowance. People used to come to him."

Sam: "Transportation. He was never involved with steamboats eh?"

Rose: "No."

Sam: "Trains, automobiles. Was anybody in your family in the world wars?"

Rose: "No. My brother had went. Joe Logan, but he didn't go overseas because of medical problems. We were living in Nash's cabins in the Old Town. That's when he came back."

Sam: "You were never involved in Old Town and the new town in Slave Lake?"

Rose: "We lived in the Old Town for a while when we first moved from Wabasca. We lived in a tent. Mike was born in Mrs. Bottle's house. After that, we had moved to Camp 6 that winter. We lived in a tent. The next summer we had moved to Nash's cabins in the Old Town. We lived there for the summer. In the winter we used to move to the sawmills in the bush, wherever there was a sawmill. We lived in Slave Lake for three years only. We went to live at Mitsue. There was a sawmill there, but he worked on the railroad."

Sam: "In those days there were close family units. Who was mainly boss in your family?"

Rose: "My father, I think, but my mother was always home to take care of everything."

Sam: "They shared responsibility?"

Rose: "Ya."

Sam: "You were a good sewer."

Rose: "Yes, I still have all that from my parents. The way my father used to talk to us about things, I follow everything so my kids will learn too."

Sam: "Political organizations and leadership. Were you involved in politics before your son got heavily involved?"

Rose: "A little bit, not too much."

Sam: "Well you used to belong to the Métis nation. You have been involved in local leadership. You showed it. See leadership in a community sometimes shows signs of how you're supposed to live, go to work and not just rely on drinking. You people are still involved in community activities, eh? You do some catering on Native style food?"

Rose: "Yes, anything."

Sam: "Your son got to be involved in politics quite a while ago, about twenty years ago I think. He's now the Minister of Social Services."

Mr. John Auger

John Auger

Slave Lake, Alberta

November 1998

John Auger and Sam Sinclair

Slave Lake, Alberta

November 1998

Interview of John Auger in Cree
Slave Lake, Alberta
Interviewed by Sam Sinclair
Translated and summarized by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 1996

John Auger is seventy-six years old. He was born in Wabasca, Alberta. He started school sometime in the 1920s at the Desmarais mission although he wanted to attend the Anglican mission on the north side. He felt the Anglican mission was more desirable because they spoke better English. His education contained a lot more religious content. John remembers being frustrated as he was not allowed to change schools.

The main diet at the mission was fish. He recalls the fish were baked in the oven, often with the scales and fins still attached. Later the skin was peeled off and the fish was served. He also remembers receiving one egg per year, usually around Easter. Occasionally wild meat, including cariboo and moose, was provided by a man named Albert Gladue. Mr. Gladue brought this meat on a carry-all which was pulled by a dog team. He then offered the meat to the mission in return for various items including flour, sugar, lard, tea and other miscellaneous items. John recalls that the trade of goods and services was far more frequent than the use of currencies as there was little employment in the region. Trapping, hunting and snaring were all essential for the survival of the community. John also remembers snaring rabbits using wire. Rabbits were plentiful and were utilized by the mission. Partridge were usually not hunted as the priests discouraged the use of guns. Berries were not usually common in the mission but were very popular with other people throughout the community. John's mother used to can saskatoon berries as well as dry them. Many different types of berries were available and were usually quite abundant in the region.

Log shacks were the common shelter of John's area. They were chinked by moss and had peeled poles packed with dirt as a roof. In later years lumber arrived to the region and buildings became constructed in a better fashion. Presently, some of these buildings still stand whereas it is very difficult to find the older log shacks.

Dog teams were a very common means of transportation in this region (presumably in the 1940s and '50s). These dogs were kept year round and were fed fish. In later years, John used horses as his main source of transportation. It was the early 1960s in which he worked for Shell Oil that John gained extensive experience with horses. Soon after different vehicles were used such as all-terrain vehicles, planes and even helicopters.

John's wage was one dollar and thirteen cents per hour. He was guaranteed ten hours a day plus food. He would fly out of Edmonton to Ft. Simpson for about twenty days at a time. This continued throughout the summers even though mosquitoes and other insects were more prevalent in the northern latitudes.

John was raised by his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Cardinal, in Lac la Biche. His first language is Cree. He moved to the Slave Lake area in the 1950s. He recalls how many people moved from Wabasca and Desmarais to a Métis settlement in Paddle Prairie. This includes the Mcleods who came from Manitoba and worked for the Hudson Bay Company. Sam Johnston was another person with a long history in the Wabasca area. He

married an Indian woman and had many kids including a son named Sammy Johnston. Sam moved to Paddle Prairie in a wagon and brought with him many cattle.

Many different types of roots and plants were used by the Native people of the area. John said he never used much of these medicines but he said they were always available to him. He recalls that some Native people had medicine for almost any kind of wound or sickness imaginable. Sometimes payment was made to a medicine man or woman in the form of gifts or even horses. Midwives also played an important part of the community. John's grandmother was a midwife and helped save the lives of many babies and their mothers. Midwives also had to act like a nurse and were sometimes the exclusive caregivers of the area.

John was born in 1919. This was shortly after the 1918 flu epidemic. An acquaintance named Charlie Gullion told John of the time he was born and of the people who had died during that time. Charlie explained that it was not really a flu but instead poison gas from the war that killed many people in the region. The south side of Wabasca known as Desmarais was one of the areas hardest hit. Little Prairie is another area that suffered. There exists a graveyard in the area that is in close proximity to the modern day airport. This area used to be reserve land but is not presently so today. Squaw Point is another area where many families struck by sickness and death are buried. A graveyard still exists in that region today. Sometimes coffins weren't always available and people were buried together in nothing more than blankets. Fear and hysteria were abundant at that time. John remembers one incident where a priest would not enter a building where a memorial was held for some of the victims. He performed his service from outside for fear of contamination. Sometimes even whiskey was used as a medicine for people that were sick or dying.

Music always had a special place in the community. Mr. Auger preferred dances featuring western style music. The dances usually took place in private homes and featured many talented guitar and fiddle players. John also attended many pow-wows which combined spirituality with music and dance. Pow-wows had many functions and were important to the community. They offered many teachings and always encouraged artistic creativity. They brought old and young together as well as people from distant communities. The songs all had specific meaning and were passed down from the generations. John also remembers food as being important as a feast usually concluded many of these ceremonies.

Storytelling was another popular form of entertainment. One mythical character named "*Wisakîcahk*" was a favourite topic of many storytellers. It was said this mysterious character was capable of supernatural feats. Many of these stories were made even more exciting and interesting by the way in which they were told. Every storyteller had his own particular style. Sometimes there were even contests to prove who was the best storyteller in the region.

During the 1930s jobs were, of course, scarce in the Slave Lake region. People had to rely more on hunting, fishing and trapping for survival. Times were probably a lot easier here than in urban areas as there were plenty of foxes, lynx and other fur bearing animals. In the 1930s the pelt of a silver fox could bring in fifty dollars or more. A pelt of a cross fox was priced at thirty dollars while a red fox was around twenty dollars. A coyote brought in five to ten dollars. In those times a thousand dollars would be sufficient in

lasting a person throughout the year. It was in 1936, though, that the number of moose began to suddenly decline. Deer, beaver and other fur bearing animals also began to appear in fewer numbers. The moose population never increased significantly until about ten years later.

John also remembers that people helped each other more. For example, some members of the community had horses to haul firewood and other essentials while there were those who never owned horses at all. These horses would always be shared, especially in times of crisis.

It was in the early 1940s that sawmills became prevalent in the Slave Lake area. There was very little unemployment as the economy boomed after the war. It was then that John moved to the Slave Lake area and started a family. He worked in the sawmill for many years and had eight or nine children. Unfortunately, his wife died approximately eight years ago.

John also talked about his grandfather who lived in north Wabasca. His grandfather, named Edward Cardinal, had four horses and approximately fifty head of cattle. Despite his success, Mr. Cardinal had other problems and unfortunately committed suicide.

John Auger was born Treaty like both of his parents. John remembers his father as being head of the household. His mother was blind for most of her life. She outlived her husband and died just a few years ago. In 1943, John voluntarily resigned as a Treaty for one hundred dollars and left the reserve. John worked outside the reserve for the remainder of his years. He now resides in an elders lodge in the Wabasca area. He's presently seventy-six and was reinstated as a Treaty member of the Wabasca band just three years ago.

Mr. Auger was successful in retaining the Treaty rights of his children as well. His two daughters who married non-Treaties were reinstated their rights. He also had a son who is an RCMP officer and another son who worked in Bermuda for five years. John is very proud of his family who live in various parts of the country. He says he never made much money but was rewarded fairly when he worked hard. He is a respected member of the community and we thank him for his time and stories.

Alphonse Beaver

Alphonse Beaver

Sam Sinclair and Alphonse Beaver

(Left to right) Francis Beaver, Alphonse Beaver, and Edna Sinclair

Alphonse Beaver, Sandy Lake, Alberta, November 1998

Interview of Alphonse Beaver (in Cree)
with Francis Beaver in Sandy Lake, Alberta
Translated and summarized by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 1996

Alphonse Beaver lives in Sandy Lake where he still enjoys trapping and other outdoor pursuits. He lives alone but is frequently visited by family members including his son, Francis, who lives in the house next to his. Mr. Beaver will be ninety-six on his next birthday which is sometime in April.

When asked about the clothing used in earlier years Alphonse remembers using mostly moose and deer hides. These hides were made into everything from dresses to moccasins. Bear hides were also used as bedding. Alphonse recalls how one year his family had eight moose hides which were stretched and tanned and later made into a tîpî. Alphonse remembers staying in tîpîs in the warmer summer and autumn months then moving into log cabins or wooden shacks for the winters. Moss and dirt were used to chink up the spaces in these cabins and a wood burning stove often kept everyone warm throughout the winter.

Mr. Beaver's diet consisted of such things as moose, deer, fish, beaver, muskrats, rabbits and lynx. One animal Alphonse did not like to eat was the otter which he said tasted awful. Alphonse also tried eating a skunk and claims it is a fairly good tasting animal. Another animal which he enjoyed is the porcupine noting that it tastes a lot like pork.

Alphonse recalls how, one year, he travelled to Calling Lake with his parents. The year was approximately 1906 and there were no roads yet constructed in the area. They followed a trail to the lake alongside their pack dogs who carried many of their supplies. Upon arriving, they encountered a lone elderly couple inhabiting the area. They became friends and shared many stories throughout their stay. Later Mr. Beaver's family moved on to a fur trading store in the Athabasca area. The store was owned by Edward Villeneuve who was well known in the Athabasca area. Mr. Villeneuve was also known for his now famous team of moose. These moose were approximately a year and a half old and were trained from the time they were very young. Alphonse recalls that the moose were strong but also stubborn if they were not properly fed. Mr. Beaver remembers seeing these moose sitting and refusing to pull anything until they were fed. This always seemed to happen around high noon and Mr. Villeneuve grew accustomed to this regular event.

During winter, ice fishing was a very common practice in all of the northern regions. Alphonse describes how they used a system of poles and nets to effectively trap fish for the winter months. Some of the fish was smoked for preservation purposes while much of the waste was given to the pack dogs for food.

Mr. Beaver remembers his mother being extremely strong and a very hard worker. She would sometimes pack their canoe many miles as they travelled from lake to lake. In the spring months they spent a lot of time trapping muskrats and mink as the ice broke up in these lakes. Later, they would return to Sandy Lake with a healthy supply of furs and fresh meat.

Alphonse was eight years old when a priest arrived in the area and asked him to go to school in a mission. Alphonse then attended school and studied the Bible as well as

other academic courses. It was approximately 1910 when Alphonse helped to build one of the first churches of the area. His job as a young boy was to cut firewood for fuel.

The only time Alphonse has ever been to a hospital was when he had a small accident with his son. He was working on a vehicle with his son when somehow he managed to slice his finger in the fan rotor. His son took him to a hospital in Athabasca but Alphonse did not feel comfortable there so he left after one night.

Alphonse worked for many years around the Athabasca area. He would help farmers with their farm work and he remembers performing such chores as thrashing and stooking as well as being a field pitcher. This was very hard work but Alphonse was strong and he worked hard for what little wages he was paid. Later, Alphonse spent time fire-fighting and he recalls his wage being five dollars a day.

Mr. Beaver is a strong Catholic even though his father practiced the more traditional Indian beliefs. He recalls seeing his father performing some supernatural phenomenon before he eventually passed away. He also remembers hearing of a story of a great flood which killed many people. He explained that this happened because people were not respecting many of the ways of the Creator. Alphonse also believed that one should not work on Sunday and he strictly maintained this tradition throughout his entire life. Mr. Beaver goes on to tell us that, one time, his son 'snuck' out of his house on a Sunday while he was praying and shot an animal with his twenty-two calibre rifle. Alphonse told him he was wrong to hunt on Sunday and that bad luck would follow. He seemed to be right, as for ten straight days his son could not kill any sort of animal. He is proud to say that his son does not hunt on Sunday anymore.

Alphonse also believes that family systems work best if power is shared equally between a man and his wife. He maintains this type of model helps build a strong family unit.

Alphonse remembers Treaty day in Wabasca where all the Treaty Indians got their annual five dollars. He said it was a special day for all the people in the area to meet and socialize. This included a visit with Solomon Bigstone who was Chief and a relation to Alphonse. He also remembers that during the start of the First World War many Indians were promised jobs but actually found themselves recruited into the army during that particular Treaty day. Alphonse recalls that many people did not totally agree with the war including one man he knew from Wabasca. This man sent back any money that was sent to him by his son (who was in the war) because he didn't think anyone should benefit from such a horrific event.

When Alphonse was a young man he would spend many winter months trapping animals. Usually he would not return home but instead would set up camps in various places. He remembers when moccasins would cost only fifty cents at the Hudson Bay stores. He cannot believe that these same types of moccasins now cost around fifty dollars in many areas. Even to this day, Alphonse still enjoys trapping and last year killed over two hundred muskrats as well as eighteen beavers. Once the skins are stretched and dried he sells them to a man in Faust who pays him a fair price for his skins. In his younger days he often traded most of his furs and hides to the Hudson Bay Company.

Mr. Beaver has three sons and one daughter who are still presently alive. The oldest boy is sixty-nine years old and lives close by. Two boys and one daughter have unfortunately passed on.

Alphonse Beaver continues to lead an active healthy lifestyle despite the fact that he will be ninety-six this year. He is well known around the regions of Sandy Lake, Calling Lake, Wabasca and Athabasca and is highly respected. We thank Alphonse for his time and for the many stories he has given us.

Interview of Alphonse Beaver in Cree
with Francis Beaver and Sam Sinclair
Translation and summary by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Linda Anderson
November 1998

Sam: "The gentleman we're going to translate his Cree to English is Alphonse Beaver who is 98 years young and he just started talking about a couple of canoes he made. I think it was in the '60s and he sold those two at $200.00 a piece. And he went on to make a bigger one, a sixteen footer. He got $800.00 for that one. Canoe making, that is birch bark canoes that he made himself—before we explain about the 16 foot canoe, he also made a small one that he got $150.00 for. When I say a small one, it's not a little ornament—it's still used in the rivers and lakes. He said he got $550.00 from a guy named Leo from Calling Lake for those three canoes. Leo from Calling Lake, I remember that man—he owned a plane—he was a Mennonite. The last one he said he made was right in Wabasca, he showed where he made it just outside his house. He got $800.00 for that and his nephew, William Beaver, seen that same canoe on display in Montreal. So it must be still there. I don't know exactly what museum it's at, but that's where it is. That's about the last one he mentioned that he made, sometime in the '60s. So he must have been in his sixties himself because he's 98 now. So that's quite a feat for the gentleman. One of the things that is important is that he never uses any nails, but he did use ribs, birch ribs that he made himself for the canoe to strengthen it. I guess, as near as I can understand, they glued them with glue so there were no nails used. I remember seeing one of those canoes that a man in Wabasca built for my dad and they were really strong birch bark canoes.

He mentioned the two canoes he made—he got $200.00 a piece for them. They took them on a plane from here to Calling Lake but they couldn't land because of bad weather so they had to go and land on another lake. (Sam asks Francis in Cree what the name of the lake was and was told it was McCullum Lake) They landed there and his wife drove down to pick up them and the two canoes." (Sam asks Francis again if he knew the Leo that Alphonse was talking about—in Cree)

Jeannette: "So when did he make those canoes?"

(Sam asks Frances and Frances asks Alphonse)

Sam: "About 25 years ago."

Jeannette: "So what did they do with them?"

Sam: "As far as they know, William Beaver, the former chief, saw those boats in a museum in Montreal. They were on display. The last one he made was a 16 footer— he got $800.00 for that one. I think I have to rephrase a little of the history of those canoes—the three smaller canoes that he built—he's not sure exactly where they went but the last time he saw them was when they flew to Calling Lake with the two canoes that's the ones he mentioned he got $200.00 apiece. Then he had another one he built for $150.00. I mentioned earlier I thought those ones went to Montreal, but now when I relisten to his Cree speaking, he said the only one that went to Montreal was the $800.00 one which was the 16 foot long. And that's in the museum in Montreal because William Beaver, his nephew who used to be chief in Wabasca, saw it there and told the builder, who is Alphonse Beaver. Other famous Beavers in that area—he talks about Joseph Beaver who

still lives in the Athabasca area, I don't know exactly how old he is but Alphonse talks like it's his older brother but I'm not sure of that but we will check it out. If it is, I saw a Joe Beaver last year and he looks really good too.

I don't know what kind of medicine these people use, the Beavers, but they sure preserve well and also keep a good clear brain which is fortunate and I think most of that is taking care of the body. Alphonse mentions about the herbs he takes— he said his main medicine is praying to the Creator in his own words in Cree that he learned from the priests that he used to travel with in Wabasca.

That's another thing he's done. He said one time he travelled with the priest for 90 days in one shot. He named some of the old places they went. The former little settlements and northern lake areas were all occupied by a certain amount of families because in those days that was their only livelihood. If they found a lake that had lots of fish, they smoked them, and any other way to save them, and also all the other wild meat that goes with it. So he certainly went through a lot, this Alphonse and to live that long and to do all that work—he sure is a well preserved man, health-wise and also such a clear mind at this age. He was talking about things that happened about 60 or 70 years ago—and it sounds like it was yesterday for him. That's why we enjoyed listening to this old gentleman who is very well liked and well respected in his area in Sandy Lake which is about 25 kms east of Wabasca, Desmarais.

Alphonse Beaver talks about how he learned to build birch bark canoes and he remembers his Dad building one when he was about 5 years old at a northern lake called Horse Lake. It's just in the area of Trout and Peerless Lake, south. There's a small lake there called Horse Lake—at least I know where it is on a map. From there as he got older, he periodically helped his dad to build birch bark canoes and pretty soon he was building them on his own.

These people, a lot of them, the old timers I know, had natural talent to build birch bark canoes, but not all of them. There was a few, but they were always busy building one for somebody else. It's just like nowadays there are a lot of natural carpenters of Aboriginal ancestry and other people in the same area can't do as well as some of them. It's nice to know who these talented people are. He was talking about how people used to do their own thing and the good part of it is when you can build something as strong as a birch bark canoe with no nails, no nothing. That's got to be something worth thinking about.

One of the things he mentioned after he was asked what kind of a diet he followed to be able to live that long without getting sick—that's something else he mentioned earlier, that he was only in the hospital one day to get his finger mended in the old Wabasca mission—he was never hospitalized for any sickness—his medicines were the herbs that he was shown that were the good medicines. He used them a lot once he knew what was good for him and also he went on the mention again about his prayers to the Creator. He says his prayers in Cree and his son said he used to also say his prayers in a very loud voice. He was very proud of his religion and he still is. He said that's what keeps him alive. He says his prayers everyday in his own Cree way.

Also his food was mainly the wild meat he liked and the fish, partridge, ducks—all the seasons—food that you get year round if you live in an area where these species of animals are. He mentioned he never did like canned foods because they didn't agree with

him. He also, naturally liked wild berries and he always could get them and his son said his dad's favourite jam to this day is blueberry. So those are the kind of things he ate that helped preserve his health as it shows. He's 98 years old and still walking around. He was very well—I don't know how you would say it in English—like you stood up good to get your picture taken and you didn't need any help, like I would if I get to that age. I don't think I'll make it but that's all right. So with that kind of food he said it doesn't give him indigestion or things like that. He tried it all so he must know what he's talking about when he talks to us."

Sam: "When the old fellow was asked when he killed his last moose, he was talking about where he lives in Sandy Lake—it is away from everybody else—it's right near the lake and there's also a little river that goes by there. He went hunting in the spring and he went looking for moose along the lake while his wife went visiting at some friends south of them at Sandy Lake. She was gone most of the day, but while he was hunting, he tracked this moose, a young moose. They always call those young animals about a year and a half old—that would be a second year calf—*Ponaskoos* in Cree which means a yearling. He said he went looking and he started tracking it and first he said when he tracked it, the track was about 2 days old. I know people who are good trackers who can tell by feeling the track and so on when it went by—whether it's a day or half a day or what have you. He said it was about 2 days old. So he went tracking it because it was going toward his house. This was about 25 years ago. So he followed it and he said the last time he noticed it, 'Now,' he said, 'the tracks were getting fresher, more like that day.' And he continued following it and finally it kind of headed into the muskeg a little bit away from his place, but it was still close to his place. He got back to his house and he was soaking wet and he was wringing out his moccasins to try and dry them and he looked out the window and he seen the moose walk by just a little ways and he went out with his gun because it was right there, barefooted, and shot at the moose and he said it went down, but he didn't kill it dead and after he shot twice, he heard a little 22 shot not too far away. Here it was his wife who shot that 22. But she thought he was signalling that he was back home or something and she was just answering his shot with the 22 because when she arrived there she didn't see the moose right away. She asked him why he had to shoot twice to attract her attention. He told his wife to look over there. There was the moose sitting up. I guess he had to shoot it once more. He said it wasn't over 60 yards from the house where he killed it. That's quite a story in itself the way it happened. But they also were humorous when they tell the story to make it more interesting to listen to."

Sam: "He was asked when he started smoking because he still smokes now and once in awhile he smokes a pipe. He said, ' I started smoking when I was just a small guy.' He said, 'I think I was born with a cigarette, smoking.' He was young when he started but he laughed about it and obviously it didn't hurt him too bad.

His son, Francis, asked him if he ever went to school and he said he did go to school for a while when he was young. He talks like he was around 10 years old when he was in there. He was one of the bigger boys then and he had to cut wood for the mission. That would be in the early 1900s—I think that mission was built around 1908—I'm not sure. But regardless, the boys had to cut wood and the girls that were bigger than the others also helped. And they had to make fires to help the little ones keep warm. He said he didn't get much schooling because they were too busy cutting wood and doing other

chores. So he said he's very limited on schooling but he remembers a few words in English, but certainly not enough to talk to others who talk a lot of English. That was his educational days, I guess and certainly he has a tremendous memory of everything that happened in the short stay he had in the mission. So I guess there's no further comments on that particular topic.

He was talking about the mission days as the end of his schooling but he went on to talk about when the carpenters came there in the early part of the century and started building. Obviously they must have used logs in a lot of the building because later on he mentioned that they used some lumber to make it bigger. I asked him if he remembered the name of the priest who was the first one running that Desmarais mission. He couldn't remember the name of the Father. But that Desmarais school as I recall was named after Father Desmarais and that's probably the one who he was talking about who was their first priest in that area.

He also mentioned he toured some of the other small communities, probably one or two of the families at some of the lakes. But he also talks about the Moose Portage area, north of Smith, when they used to call it Moose Lake. Now they call it Fawcett Lake. He toured with the priest in that area. He was 4 days short of two months in that travel. He knows it right to the day. He's got that good of a memory. He's got a lot of experiences in the north and certainly he can remember almost everything he's done. We can't record every word because some of the things are less important. But overall, we don't miss the most important things he did do that should be recorded and people, young people who will be listening to this some day, hopefully, it sinks in on how tough it was in those days of living."

(Break)

Sam: "I guess one of the things I want to mention that I missed when he was talking about the Moose Lake where he took that priest—there used to be two Moose Lakes. The one he talks about used to be Moose Portage earlier, around Fawcett Lake area. But the Moose Lake as I understood him to say was a small lake and I think it's still in existence, south of Nimuir Lake, which is probably due west of Fort McMurray. It's a small lake where a group of people lived. I think there was even a small reserve there at one time. But anyway, that was one of the little areas he talked about when he was travelling with that priest. It's a little confusing with no map in front of me but I know where that lake is on the map and I've asked others why they quit calling it Moose Lake—they gave it another name but I don't know what it was exactly."

Jeannette: "How many kids did they have?"

Sam: "That's a little confusing also because they lost 3 boys for sure of his own family and 1 girl and there was 3 of them still living off that family but there seemed to be some half brothers and sisters probably from a former marriage either by her or him and it sounds like it's from her. They had a tough time with their children because of no hospital and other things that people preserve their lives with. He also mentions that there was a lot of children lost in that area, Wabasca, Desmarais, Sandy Lake when whooping cough was in that area. The nearest he could explain was probably in the late thirties or maybe it went on into the forties when they lost quite a few through whooping cough. That also hit the Slave Lake area when we were kids, I don't know how many were lost but he talked about like it was like an epidemic. It did do a lot of harm in there. I forgot to mention a

very important person in that family who was the mother. Her name was Mary Louise Beaver. She was originally a Cardinal and she was the one who toughed it out with him. She was around 75 when she passed away, so she didn't quite make it like he did".

Jeannette: "What was your mother's name?" (to Francis)

Francis: "Mary Louise Beaver—she was Mary Louise Cardinal before."

Jeannette: "Was your dad a 'Treaty?'"

Frances: "Yes, he was a Treaty."

Jeannette: "Was your mom?"

Frances: "No, not before she got married."

Sam: "Again, I made another little mistake when she was 75, but she actually passed away 13 years ago and Alphonse remembers she died in the early part of December. It would have been in 1985. According to the records she was born in 1898 because she was 2 years older than Mr. Beaver and they were also married 62 years before she passed away. Apparently they found each other right in that area where they lived, right in the Sandy Lake area about 25 km. east of Desmarais. That's a pretty good track record also for a couple staying together that long and toughing it out together and remembering the things to the day he explains it.

He mentions when he lost his wife, I guess she was starting to get fairly unsettled in her thinking when she was so sick and she didn't know exactly what she was doing. She wandered away from home a couple times and came back because of her sickness and she never went to the hospital. It was hard to tell what she really had, but she finally died and she died in her own blood from hemorrhaging inside her body. That's where they lost her. Before that they tried to take her out to Slave Lake and there was no doctor then, there in Slave Lake. Alphonse wanted her to go to Edmonton where the doctors would be better and she refused to go so they brought her back home where she got sicker and finally died from it. It upset him so bad he couldn't eat for about a month. He lost a lot of weight and the thing he said that really saved him was there was a little boy he hadn't seen in awhile—I think his grandson—and he said they went to this place to visit—where this grandchild was—and there was tîpî poles there and other things that brought back his memory of some of the things he used to do before he got sick from loneliness. The little boy said something to him like, 'Grandpa,' and something in Cree. And he said it was just like it shot a new life into his system and he started eating that day and from then on he picked up and got his strength back. It was really amazing how he recovered.

So these kinds of stories are worth documenting because that is some of the ways people lived and followed their beliefs. He talked about some of the Indian tea called *maskihkiwâpoy*, that is a number of different plants of different kinds—herbs that they make. I don't personally know what they put in there but it's usually strong medicine and it has cured a lot of people even in our day. My mother used to be helped out by her sister who knew Indian medicine. That's what the old man, Alphonse, relied on. They had their own medicines and they took them accordingly and it worked. So that was a great feat in itself."

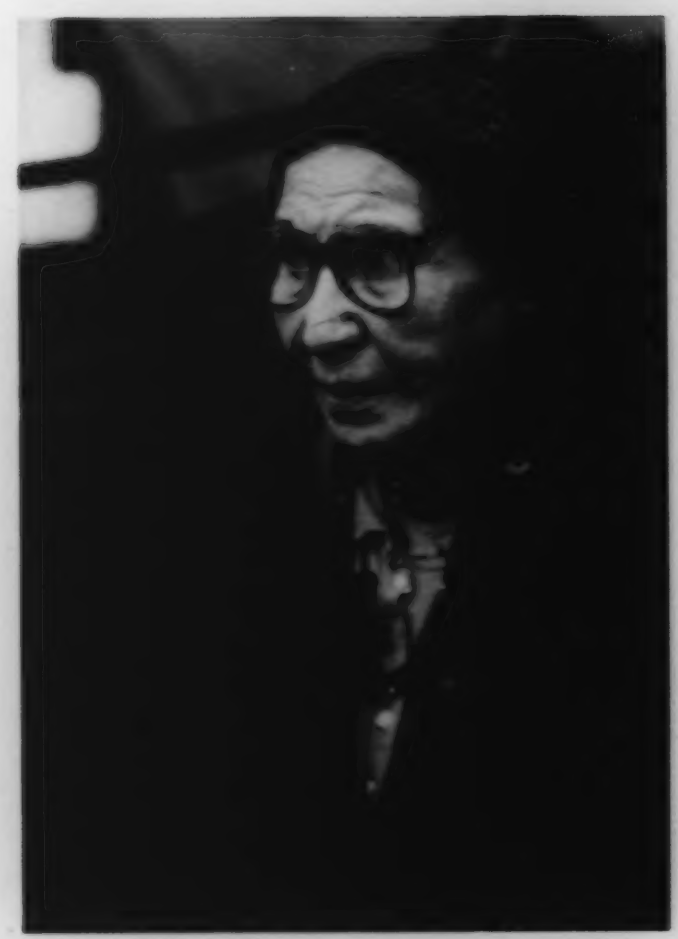
Sam: "He also mentioned about a sickness he had, probably a bad case of pneumonia. And he coughed up some bad stuff from his insides and it really made him sick. But when he didn't get better they checked him out someplace where they tried to put him to sleep. That medicine wouldn't work on him but they put so much stuff in him, I guess, when he

did fall asleep they had trouble waking him up. And he mentioned that when they didn't wake him up, it was one of his own relations who came to help wake him up because they kept talking to him. He said he could faintly hear what was said. He went on to say that anybody who is put out, there should always be a loved one there to help them bring them back to life. He says he's known several people in his time who never did come to after they were given a certain amount of medicine. I think he has a good point there because I have some trouble myself from the same thing—trying to wake up after being put to sleep so long. I think that pretty well covers that."

Sam: "The other thing that he mentions is that he got hurt in the mission. He got his finger caught in some machine and it took the tip off his finger. He showed us the finger. I guess they had some kind of a doctor then in Wabasca, Desmarais and they told him after they sewed it up and everything that they would have to hold him for fourteen days until he got better but he didn't want to stay in the hospital. He said his clothes were there handy so he snuck out and went home. He said, 'That injury was nothing for me—I wanted to get out.' Obviously then he was a grown up person. He got better and he was proud that he never had to stay in the hospital overnight.

He went on to mention that there was a young man who we know as well, named Dale Auger, who is an artist and he took some pictures of Alphonse Beaver and his wife when she was still alive. And they have those pictures displayed someplace, probably some in Edmonton, maybe. Dale lives in Calgary and we might be able to trace those pictures down some way. People might not really know how important that couple was. So that was kind of a good ending to his story. He certainly is a good talker, a good thinker and certainly worth interviewing and I hope to talk to him sometime again."

Mrs. Mary Louise Bellam



Mary Louise Bellam

Widewater, Alberta

November 1998

Mary Louise Bellam

Widewater, Alberta

November 1998

(Left to Right) Sam Sinclair, Mary Louise Bellam, and Edna Sinclair

(Left to right) Edna Sinclair, Mary Louise Bellam, and Sam Sinclair
Widewater, Alberta August 1997

(Left to right) Sam Sinclair, Mary Louise Bellam, Linda Anderson, Edna Sinclair
(Foreground) Moosement drying on racks August 1997

Interview of Mary Louise Bellam in Cree
Widewater, Alberta
Interviewed, translated, and summarized by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 1996

Sam: "Mary Louise Bellam was born in 1910 and is from the Beaver Lake area located near Lac La Biche. Her family moved to Wagner (Widewater) in the 1940s. They bought some private land from a man named Shorty and eventually moved into the area. Mary was raised close to the Athabasca river because at that time families had to live close to available food sources. Mrs. Bellam recalls that wild onions were one particular food source that thrived in these areas. She also spent time around where the House river runs into the Athabasca river.

Mrs. Bellam attended many pow wows as a young lady. She remembers how her parents would enjoy attending various dances in the Athabasca area. Some of these dances would be called, *mochiguns*, which means 'having fun' in Cree. During such events the children would often have to sleep in separate bunkhouses while the parents were at the dance. One night Mary had eaten some candy and while she slept a mouse crept up and bit her in the mouth. She finds humour in the story but also remembers that the bite caused her considerable pain.

Mary's father was named Julian Beaver. She was also related to the Quintels who were known to be very proficient hunters. In approximately 1915, Mrs. Bellam remembers using a scow to cross the Athabasca river on a hunting expedition.

Mary's husband was named Ernie Bellam. In 1973, he was struck and killed by a vehicle while walking on the side of a road. Sadly, this was one of many tragedies for Mary and the Bellam family. Mary had three sons who were also killed by vehicles in amazingly similar circumstances. George, Roy and Paul were all killed while walking on the side of the road. Charges were never laid against any of the persons responsible for the accidents even though alcohol may have played a role in some of these tragedies. Mrs. Bellam did receive a small cash settlement for the death of her son George, but it obviously could not compensate for the loss of her son. Mary often wonders why the authorities never brought justice to these cases.

Despite being left alone, Mrs. Bellam went on to raise eight grandchildren in the Slave Lake area. She admits there were always problems to be dealt with. One problem that affected Mary and her family was alcohol. Mary sometimes suffered physical abuse at the hand of her intoxicated husband, Ernie. Despite these troubles, Mary never thought about leaving her husband at any time. She recalls the vows of her wedding which stated that the marriage should be honoured "for better or worse". Mary says she has a lot of faith in her family and it is that strength which managed to keep them together.

Before 1973, Mary's husband and sons always seemed to keep busy with work. Ernie worked in a sawmill in the Slave Lake area for many years. There was little work in the summers as only a few sawmills would operate year round. In the winter, more sawmills would operate as timber was easier to access. In approximately the 1930s, he would build roads using a scoop and a team of horses. He would earn $2.50/day for the use of his team as well as $2.50/day for the use of his services. In those times, five dollars

a day was a decent wage but it was not available to everyone and there was no such thing as welfare payments. The only help one could expect was the gift of moose meat or other such food sources. Mary's father is an example of one who has helped both the Natives and the Europeans who were in need in the Lac La Biche area.

Mrs. Bellam still makes *kâhkewak* (dry meat) whenever there is moose meat available. She is also very talented at drying hides although she admits it is tiring for her now. She may make one or two hides a year but in years past she would make one or two hides a month. Mary also made moccasins which she both sold and traded for goods of equal value. She also gave many pairs away to many family and friends.

Besides moose meat, there were many other food sources available to the people of the Lac La Biche region. Muskrats, ducks, partridge and chickens were other foods that Mrs. Bellam remembers eating as a child. Sometimes these wild meats were smoked and cured for taste as well as for preservation purposes. Mary remembers the surveyors that were in the Lac La Biche area in approximately 1913 also enjoyed dried meat and other wild game. Fish was also a main food source for those who could obtain it. Mrs. Bellam recalls that it was sometimes difficult to catch fish from the Athabasca river but there was always fish to be caught from the Wabasca lakes. These fish would be salted and dried and would last her family for a considerable time. Gardens were also very important and supplied many people with fruits and vegetables although Mary's parents were never in one place long enough to have one. Later, Mary managed her own garden in her present residence of Wagner. Presently, she no longer does work in the garden as physical labour has become more difficult for her. She hopes that her younger grandchildren will continue to produce and manage gardens for her and her family in the future.

As a child, Mary spent time in the Bigstone band mission. She recalls the food as being very unpleasant. They were served jaek fish for extended periods of time and they were punished if they did not eat it. The fish was prepared in the oven with guts and scales still present. Lumpy oatmeal was served for breakfast with limited amounts of brown sugar and there was no butter available for their [redacted] or toast. During the summer months many children were allowed to visit home but she would have to stay as her family lived in a remote location from the mission. In the fall, she would spend a lot of time picking potatoes and other produce from the garden. She says she sometimes would feel like a 'caged animal'. Mary states that the only time they were treated well was when government officials came to inspect the convent. Mary was approximately nine years old when she left the mission with her family and came to the Athabasca area.

Mrs. Bellam recalls how homes were created in these earlier days. Most of the lumber was cut with a broad saw which two people pulled back and forth. The roofs were often packed with mud for better insulation from the rain and snow. One drawback of this type of insulation is that it would sometimes be very dirty inside the cabin. Sometimes clay stoves were built inside these homes as well. Some of these stoves contained an oven in which bannock and other meals could be made. These stoves were made of large rocks and the clay would act as a mortar. The stoves would be a wonderful source of heat in the cold winter months.

Mary is very knowledgeable about the use of herbs and traditional medicines. She has been a midwife to many Native women in her community. Mary states that she never takes any prescribed or store bought medications but instead relies solely on her traditional

medicines. She has been extremely healthy for most of her life although she had to use a hospital one time because of physical abuse suffered at the hands of her husband. Another woman who was skilled in the art of Native healing techniques was named Mrs. Chalifoux. She was from Driftpile and is related to our translator, Mr. Sam Sinclair's wife, Edna. This woman, who was Edna's grandmother, was another excellent healer and was respected in the community. Mary mentions that she was a fine woman and that she has a lot of respect for the woman who was healthy right up until she died in her eighties. Mary Bellam explains that if you really believe and have faith that a medicine will work for you, then it most certainly will. It is the lack of faith that will destroy the healing powers of most medicines in many people.

Mrs. Bellam remembers that a main source of transportation in her earlier years was the use of horses. Her family would use as much as ten horses as they travelled from one community to another. Her mother would ride horses while the children would alternate between riding and walking.

Mrs. Bellam has spent time in school and speaks fluent English although she is more comfortable speaking her Native language of Cree. Mary is defined as a Métis by the government of Canada but she knows she was born an Indian and will die as one. She has been witness to abuse and misuse of many laws in relation to the Native people of her communities. She knows that politics and other personal agendas have played an instrumental role in relation to the rights and privileges that many Indians have received. She remembers that when she was in the mission she was acknowledged as having Treaty status but later was told that she never had Treaty status at all. She also recalls that a Chief by the name of Paul Twinn wanted to accept her as a Treaty woman in the 1940s but this never did come about. She is confident that her children could obtain their Treaty rights if they pursued it but they have not done so to this date. She states that she would be most happy with obtaining hunting rights as moose meat is still a very important resource to her and her family.

We'd like to thank Mary Louise Bellam for her time and for the stories which she has shared. She is a healthy, wise woman who is still very sharp at the age of eighty-seven. On behalf of myself, Sam Sinclair, and Damon Kapatch, we'd once again like to thank her."

Interview of Mary Louise Bellam in Cree
Widewater, Alberta
Interviewed and translated by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Linda Anderson
November 1998

Sam: "The person we're interviewing now is Mary Louise Bellam who is 88 years old, and a very intelligent woman who has a good memory of her past. She was never involved with alcohol. She was telling us she had one drink of beer (a glass) in the past—it made her sick—she threw up. She said, ' I never touched it again.' This was in the Slave Lake area. She's spent a lot of her earlier years in, she called it Elk Lake in Cree— it's in the Lac La Biche area. I guess she was apparently born in that general area, probably in the bush.

One thing that I didn't know, but I know now is her grandmother was French and she could speak fluent French. One of her sisters could understand her grandmother, some French, some Cree. From there, she had brothers and sisters but she says she has only one relation that is still alive. She says all the rest are gone and she says it's makes her life a little more difficult because she has no one to relate to in her age bracket. But she also went on to mention she knew Mrs. Marie Chalifoux who was my wife's grandmother from Grouard. She knew them well, and also Philomine Gladue, but she was a Chalifoux, by birth.

She talks about the way of life and how they used to travel to Lac Ste. Anne and mix with the people there. They used to go in earlier years, by wagon and a team of horses and so on. But later on they hired old trucks, and drivers like Dolphus Davis who is long gone—but certainly would not be a youngster if he'd been alive—and other people who had old vehicles. She said they would be broken down half of the time but she said they still generally got there.

She's had an interesting life over the years, living in the North—fish and moosemeat, and that's also her regular diet now. She doesn't touch much canned goods. She believes in gardening and other things you can grow yourself. Also she believes in the wild berries—that's kept her healthy too.

She goes on to mention besides trying to learn a little bit of French when she was young, she also heard French when she was in the convent. She could understand a little then but has certainly forgot it since. A lot of her life was around the Lesser Slave Lake area. She got there in 1944, which would make it 54 years she's been in the Slave Lake area.

She did a bit of work for a farmer who was close by. It was interesting to hear that when some people gave her some land, she made sure that the paper was signed by the husband of the people who owned the land to make sure she had ownership. Even though she could not read or write, somebody advised her how it could be done. She said the man (the owner of the land) was actually an honest guy, but after he died, that women tried to take that land away from her until she showed her the papers. It was only a few acres and she still lives on it, but it goes to show how Aboriginal people are treated sometimes. They figure we don't know what's going on. It showed right there that they tried to take that land away from her but she proved otherwise. She said, 'I have papers here that stated that your husband allowed me that land for my husband's work and I'm keeping it.' And she's

still there so I guess they had to honor that transaction that happened over forty years before. So that was part of her history there.

She goes on to talk about her way of life—her old man, Mr. Bellam. He used to be an old drinker but he was also a good worker. She was telling the story that she always like to keep a record of things that happened and she had a few records of actual things that happened there that could have been of some value, but he didn't believe in it. Her husband, burnt a lot of valuable things that she wanted to keep. She said she actually had to beat him up once when he was drinking and complaining. (She laughed). She must have been quite a sturdy woman because I remember her husband was just a small guy, but like I said he was a good worker.

In those days too they were living off of the land. They were not so strict on game laws until later on and people who really needed the wild meat were getting it on the sly and nobody was really bothering them—and there was fish in Lesser Slave Lake. At that time there was also mink farmers when they first came there and a lot of them had work for them. Certainly a man by the name of Shorty Rensfelt done a lot of good for them I guess—he liked Mr. Bellam and his wife. They got quite a bit of work from him before he passed on. So when you hear about those kind of records. . . . And they also had a number of grandchildren in the area. But one thing she talked about to me before was losing four people in one family—their family—the father and three boys, that they know was possibly through alcohol. They were run over by maybe drunken drivers and nothing was really done about their deaths because in those days they didn't properly investigate a person of very little notice in the White sector. I remember those days, it wasn't properly investigated even though they knew who was the killer and they never really punished them in any way—where there could have been insurance money coverage and everything else which never did materialize. She sees those as bad memories of the area. But certainly sometimes when you have alcohol involved, there's a lot of things that could have been avoided if the conditions were right. I think they all got hit just before dark or when it was dark. Anyway these are some of the things she talks about that she doesn't like. Like the way it happened—nobody would if they were in the same boots as her.

One thing she mentioned in the early days of her life, she remembers the big boats that used to be pulled by tug ropes along the river banks all the way to Slave Lake and then they loaded them on the bigger boat to haul freight to Grouard. Her husband was involved in that too, in his early days just as a helper or something. He didn't actually help with the pulling of the boats—he would have been too young for that like my father was a little too young. But she remembers—she calls it the big river— that's the Athabasca River she's talking about. She remembers the big steamboat they used to run and then the actual freighting. When they were empty they more or less drifted down the river. They all talked about that. But it's when they were coming upstream that they had to pull because the river was going the opposite way they were pulling. And that was a well known fact years ago that you had to be well conditioned and healthy to be able to pull that boat. It was a great feat in those days and people were proud of it. I remember seeing some of the people years ago who were involved in that and they were proud. It was almost like being a veteran in the war, the way they talked about how hard it was. And they bragged about some of the better ones who were well known pullers and certainly showed signs (of it).

The better man showed up when they were really needed and that was the way of life in those days and she remembers that. So that's another milestone.

One of the things too we had along—Jeannette Sinclair who's in charge of this survey had pictures from the Archives on some of the boats that they used in those days. I don't know what they exactly call them . . . .tugboats, I think. And she remembers seeing them by looking at the pictures. She says, ' I remember that boat.' Sometimes pictures themselves tell the story by looking at them and it relates to something that they did at that time when those boats were such an important way of life for transportation and certainly for hauling food to the North with the boat tugs.

She went on to mention a few prominent people in those days. One old lady in the Old Town called Mrs. Thompson, who was married to a little Englishman, who used to be a magistrate and I don't know what else. He used to have some key positions on "land" anyway and then she went on to mention a woman they called Frenchwoman who wasn't actually French, but she could understand some. She was Mrs. Schroder from Wabasca who was a well known woman and certainly Paul was also into bush life all of his life. He was married to a German immigrant who was quite prominent, a forest ranger in the North in the Wabasca area in the early 1900s. She mentions some of these people, who were to her, important, because they were dependent on people in the lesser role who needed some guidance and so on. So when she mentions she knew some other people as well like *Kinosew*—meaning in Cree, like Kinuso, Alberta was named after this *Kinosew* which means 'fish,' as the first leader.

They didn't necessarily call them Chiefs then, they called them Headmen. He was a prominent man. There's a picture of him there. He's tall and strong looking. They never used to have chiefs— like one in Slave, one in Driftpile, Kinuso, Sucker Creek and Sturgeon Lake. This man was in charge of it all and later on they had a bit of corruption I guess because of too many bosses and not enough Indians. It's an old saying and I'm not trying to criticize anybody. It's just that Indian Affairs really kind of ran the show in those days and even now at times. So they had their own ways of haggling their own affairs and certainly have come a long ways in line of their education, hospitalization and so on. So she is very aware of the gains that have been done which have been beneficial now in comparison to what it was in their tough times.

She also mentions that her grandfather and even maybe her father was involved in the military in the 1800s—the late 1800s . They used to pack mail from the Wabasca area and some other smaller communities by packing the mail on their back with a big packsack. I think later on they also used dogs to pack this mail. I was told that by other people and she remembers that. And later on actually, they used horses where the mailman used to haul to Wabasca four times a month, return trips—with a sleigh in the wintertime and a wagon in the summer. She remembers all those things. But it's amazing when she was just a little girl where they were still hauling some mail on their backs. I imagine they were using horses later on but certainly it must have been quite a feat to have a big pack of mail and go 100 miles in probably three days.

She also mentioned the flood in 1935—the big flood in Slave Lake at Old Town when everything was hard on everybody who lived there, including us. She remembers some of the people, like Mrs. Nash, who was originally Mrs. L'Hirondelle, a Belgian who came from overseas. They had a store for years and her husband was a Métis, a very

prominent one, August L'Hirondelle. He was a kind of a leader, also for the non-Treaty people that were known as Half-breeds those days, now known as Métis. There were other people too that she mentioned who were quite valuable in those days.

I think she doesn't totally remember, but she should be mentioned, a lady by the name of Mrs. MacDonald who raised quite a family and was known as the best berry picker Slave Lake ever had. She died at about 100 and she (Mary Louise) knew her too—not real well—but certainly knew about her berry picking efforts. The reason I think she lived so long was because she walked every day and walked to town. I never saw her in her younger days every riding in a vehicle. She always walked and she was another one who was instrumental in helping our people in Slave Lake. Everybody liked her and certainly she was worth mentioning in this report—everybody knew her.

She went on to mention some people from Wabasca, Desmarais area who had some prominent names—one they call 'a mean boss' in Cree. He was a Yellowknee. He was known for his freighting in the olden days. We always thought he was really mean because he was rough in a lot of ways. We didn't know him as well as she did and she thought he was quite a likable person so we'd have to go by her statement. There was another one she named, they called 'No Blanket' because he was so tough he would sleep in the woods even in the roughest weather without a blanket, but probably by a little fire because there was even one doing that about 25 years ago when I worked up in the Wabasca area who was still sleeping in the woods with no blankets. What he would do I was told was he would make a fire and when it was going out he would put spruce bows over it so it wouldn't burn but just heat it and he would lie down on those spruce boughs over those coals and that would keep him warm all night. I'm talking about below zero weather when I was up there. So they had a lot of tough ways of doing things but they must have believed in their way of life cause they survived and certainly they got nicknames out of it. It certainly a feat for people to do that.

She also remembers when she was really young, in Wabasca, where they had a foot race between two prominent runners and one of them was her relation. He used to dress up with ribbons on his legs and he got to have the nickname 'Ribbonlegs' and the other guy that challenged him, she could only remember him as Peter. But she said they had a race for about a mile and drew a big crowd in those days, probably a couple hundred people. This 'Ribbonlegs' won the race by quite a bit, but I guess it was nip and tuck at the start. And anyway they were on the home stretch and 'Ribbonlegs' really left him behind—she said the cheer of the people went to him because he was a local guy and the other person was an outsider. She told that story with a lot of enthusiasm. She thought it was really good too what they could do in those days.

I used to hear about some of those great runners. My dad was known to be a long distance runner too in his young days. Those are the kind of things they used to do because the sports activities in those days were very limited. So what they could do, one of them was 'run' (with the least cost), was a well-known competitive sport.

She also talks about my wife's grandmother who she knew well. Marie Chalifoux was her name. I guess they went, when they were young—they all went in a couple of little trucks which one of them was my father-in-law's truck, and they went to Lac St. Anne. The truck she was on was kind of a jalopy and Edna's grandmother was on that truck too and the truck upset by a place called Charlie Lake, about 15 miles east of Smith

on the old #2 highway, and she bounced off. And she said they thought she was hurt because she banged her head on something quite solid and they asked her if she was hurt bad. She said, 'The reason I didn't get hurt bad was because I just came from Lac St. Anne church.' And it's good when people believe the good things of life—sometimes it saves you.

And when you're talking about those days, you're looking at probably my wife being a baby girl then, probably about 65 years ago, so it's quite awhile. She would have been, around 23 then— that is Mrs. Bellam, the one we are interviewing. She remembers, but my wife doesn't remember because she was too young probably. She kind of faintly remembers the trip but again she was along there someplace. Mrs. Bellam talking about Lac Ste. Anne in the thirties in the old jalopies, at the same time, even maybe a little earlier on those trips, they used to cross—I was involved in it when I was a little kid in the thirties. They used to call a trail there—it's still open for travel maybe on horseback—it's called Holmes trail. I think it was named after some old surveyor that surveyed in that area in the early 1900s because my dad remembered him when he was still navigating.

In those days when you traveled across there, they hunted on their way to Lac. Ste Anne. They probably left a couple of weeks before the actual church and they hunted. And if they killed a moose, they dried the meat. And by the time they got to Lac Ste. Anne, they all had meat with them, all dried, which was quite popular in those days. It still is—the dry meat. And they shared it with the other people who probably didn't have any. It's a far cry from what they do now. They still have dry meat around but they certainly don't share it with their people now for nothing. So things have changed. But certainly the friendship is still there in Lac Ste. Anne and we go every year.

In those days, I can vaguely remember, there might have been 1000 people there altogether, it's hard to say. Now the last few years there's been everything from about 20,000 to 30,000 that go to that pilgrimage. They come from all over—from the States, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, to the West—B.C. Really it's quite a scene when you look at it now because over half of them are in tent trailers or 5th wheelers, quite prominent looking. It's a far cry than when every family in those days had a tent or tîpî. It really looked good when those were there too. They used to have some violent storms sometimes. I remember 30 years ago probably when a big storm hit there—thunderstorm and everything. It flattened every tent that was out there. It was really sad because a lot of the poor people couldn't fight with that big storm. They were soaking wet in the morning—tents were flattened. We were out there helping a little bit, what we could to help the ones who were crippled and couldn't help themselves. But now with the new facilities, good bathrooms, showers, people are getting to be better treated with the better conditions. But there are still people who live in poverty in the North and really have a tough time getting there sometimes because they don't have much money. They generally hire buses—they come by the busloads all the way from Saskatchewan and other places.

But it's a good memory and certainly the things that Mrs. Bellam brought to our attention with her stories really helps to live a life and think of all the honesty that was carried out then with the worst conditions and times. But certainly the honesty is still there with our people. There's also a lot of corrupt things like drugs and alcohol. As bad as the alcohol is, it changed a lot. You don't see a lot in Lac Ste. Anne. But certainly the drugs are there and because they're hard to spot—in anything I know about, they look bleary

eyed, but they still seem to navigate well enough they don't get thrown in jail. Alcohol is a different thing, just as deadly but at least was noticeable. People would help other friends to not get in trouble."

Mr. John Bellerose

John Bellerose and Sam Sinclair

Slave Lake, Alberta

November 1998

John Bellerose

Interview of Mr. John Bellerose (* Bob Kreutzer sat in on this interview)
Interviewed by Mr. Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
Slave Lake, Alberta
March 1996

Sam: "This gentleman we're going to talk to first is named John Bellerose. He's been here a long time but he's also been in the general Slave Lake area and other areas like Wabasca and a few others. We're going to try and get a picture or a story just as much as we can from him on the flexibility of him to explain how he lived his young days and how he made a living. If he forgets something we'll come back to it later. So John, where were you born?"

John: "I was born in Jasper, Alberta, in the mountains."

Sam: "What year was that?"

John: "Nineteen ten."

Sam "So you are eighty-five."

John: "Yes."

Sam: "Did you grow up in Jasper or were you born there and then left?"

John: "No. My grandfather and my dad were surveying in Jasper. That's why I was born there. I was baptized in Rivière Qui Barre That was a French town. My grandfather was a Frenchman (my dad's dad)."

Sam: "You said you were born in Jasper so from there where did you go?"

John: "They brought me to Rivière Qui Barre. From there my dad lived in St. Albert."

Sam: "That's where the Bellerose's are from."

*Bob: "They got a street there in St. Albert. Is that anything to do with you people?"

John: "Ya, that was my grandfather who had owned a lot of land there. A long time ago guys could get all the land they wanted. In sections, not in quarters. They had land there, land in Morinville, land at Rivière Qui Barre and land at Villeneuve. Not like now, you can't get land."

*Bob: "The last land I got was off of you."

Sam: "So, from Rivière Qui Barre you could start where you started working or helping because there was not a lot of work in those days."

John: "No. From there we moved when I was five years old. The golden days appeared. Gold, in Peace River. Did you see those Sloans from North Dakota? They were going to Peace River and they didn't have no money. They had to stop in Kinuso and that's where they stopped. Then we moved. We had seven teams, wagons. Then we had spare horses because we had to change over. That was all the way from Morinville through here to Grouard. We travelled on the north shore of this lake and then we hit Grouard and winter was upon us. At Grouard we had to stop. So from there we went to Peace River. That was about 1916 when the railroad hit Peace River. I went to school for five years. My mother worked on the Hudson Bay boat. She was a cook. A guy by the name of Charlie Gullion was the captain of the Hudson Bay boat. They used to go away for a month at a time, five weeks. My dad worked for the railroad. They didn't see each other for a month, five

weeks. I stayed with my grandfather. I couldn't stay with my dad. Eddie was born in Peace River. Then we kind of moved back."

Sam: "When you talk about your grandfather, it's not the one that I know is it?"

John: "Savard ya. He had a ranch in Morinville. He wasn't a farmer but he had cattle. Sold all his cattle and sold all his land to move up there (Marten River). That's how come he came back to Kinuso. I was sixteen years old when we moved to Marten River, we moved right across. We had about sixty-two head of cattle. We had a rack filled with hay and we would go five or six miles and then we had to stop and let the cows have a feed. That was a long ways and cold. That's how we come to Marten River. My grandfather started a delivery barn for the freighters. That's where we stayed until I was seventeen. Then I started working out in Spurfield."

Sam: "That's that Canyon Creek lumber company isn't it?"

John: "Fields and Patterson. They started in Kinuso. I worked for them in Kinuso. I used to be a fireman for the steam boiler. Wood, eh, big slabs. Four feet long. Then they came to Canyon Creek. From Canyon Creek they hit Spurfield. Swanson lumber took over there for a while. They got it from Fields and Patterson."

Sam: "Do you know who bought it later? This guy used to be president of the Edmonton Eskimos. His name was probably Cecil Cook? Two brothers anyway and they were the ones who bought from Fields and Patterson. They had a big outfit in Grande Prairie as well, a big lumber company."

John: "How I come to know this here, there is a guy by the name. . . . I forget. I have an article here in The Leader. He was talking about 1927. He said when Fields and Patterson was going to move, Swanson Lumber took over. That's what he said in this article."

Sam: "When we say Swanson Lumber Company I remember before that they used to call themselves Chisholm Sawmills because I used to work for that outfit years ago."

John: "From there I went to Smith and I ran the ferry with Johnny Brazeau. I worked two or three years. I'll give you a little story about running the ferry. I ran this guy across and he had a model A. So when you dock you jump off and you tie up. But before I tied that, he was going to take off and he went back into the river. The Model A was just sticking out, the top was sticking out. Here the ferry was halfway in the river and it couldn't go the other way because you have to steer those things and it stayed there for a hell of a long time until somebody seen it and told the Brazeaus. So the Brazeaus came down in a rowboat. They had to get an old tractor to pull it out. You see he didn't give me enough chance. I had it around but no knot."

Sam: "You also worked for Swanson for a number of years in Fawcett Lake and other places."

John: "I spent nineteen years with Swanson. Summer and winter, well I stayed right with him."

Sam: "Weren't you a mechanic there once?"

John: "I ran the boat and I was a mechanic for bulldozers and tractors. I did everything for Swanson. Every time Gunther wanted somebody to go out, "We'll get John Bellerose he'll go out". They even sent me to Buffalo Park twice. There was a guy

who had a contract falling trees. The guy quit so they came up here because John Bellerose will go. So I went up and cut trees for two months. When I was through there I came back. It wasn't a year after that when they wanted me to go back and work with Stan Pollard. Him and I went up there and overhauled a 'dozer motor and then we fixed tracks. I stayed four months. I made that airstrip there, that Sweetgrass."

Sam: "I remember those years you guys went. That was in the 1950s when Bob and I worked up here with the planer. Well Ed was subcontracting. So what can you remember of the old times? How did people dress a long time ago, did they have a lot of moosehide clothes?"

John: "No, not in my time. Well for moccasins, that's all we had to wear was moccasins and rabbit skin. Dry the rabbit skin and turn it inside out and we used hay. You put a good pair of moccasins on and then you put the rabbit skin over and then another big pair of moccasins and a little bit of hay at the bottom."

Sam: "I remember those days too. I never had two pair of moccasins but I remember having hay inside the moccasin, especially if you were going to snowshoe."

John: "As far as clothes, the women made these homemade parkas."

Sam: "To be honest moosehide jackets are not really warm. You got to have something under it. It's good for shelter. You remember those old GWG jackets? A lot of people used to wear big sweaters and then those on top. That really seals it. I used to see my dad dressed like that all the time."

John: "There were guys that wore moosehide pants too."

Sam: "What kind of food did you eat?"

John: "Moose and rabbit, fish."

Sam: "You never had no elk? Not in this area anyway."

John: "No. The old people used to can berries. Pick berries and can berries. My grandmother never used to cook cranberries. She kept the box outside and that's how she kept them."

Sam: "What about gardens?"

John: "Everybody had a garden. That's one thing everybody had."

Sam: "That was a must in those days. What about log cabins?"

John: "That's all there was in those days."

Sam: "Did you ever get involved in trapping?"

John: "Yes, I used to go down the Wabasca river and up to the Panney River. I used to go there, maybe a little further like Birch Mountain, Birch Hills. When we were in Wabasca there was no help. If you didn't support yourself you had 'er. I used to do gardens with the Hudson Bay, Revions and the mission. I used to be there all day."

Sam: "How did you travel in those days, a lot on foot?"

John: "Foot and dogs."

Sam: "Snowshoes?"

John: "Ya."

Sam: "Horseback, wagons, canoes, toboggans Most of the toboggans were homemade."

John: "Ya, they had them carry-alls."

Sam: "What was your first language?"

John: "Cree."

Sam: "Knowledge, use of high Cree. I don't even know high Cree but Wabasca talks good Cree, about the best in our country."

John: "They all talk a little different. Like you take Slave Lake and Wabasca, they're a little different. Some have French mixed. I shoed horses, there was nobody who could shoe horses in Wabasca. My grandfather used to show me and I used to shoe his horses. You had to do everything. I commercial-fished three years in Wabasca."

Sam: "Were you involved a little bit in French? You had mentioned you grandmother spoke French. Grandfather, ya that guy used to swear at us in French. His old grandfather, old Savard. That's Louis' stepdad."

John: "He come from Montreal. I seen Savard. They play hockey. That's his relation. I think my grandmother was a cousin to Pat Courtoreille."

Sam: "Same as my mother. My mother and Mrs. Savard were half- sisters. Their dad was Michel Courtoreille. Do you know any Cree names of any places that maybe used to be quite famous and the name was changed?"

John: "There's lots."

Sam: "Anything, maybe in Wabasca that used to be Cree name and then they changed it because they ruined a lot of this old stuff."

John: "Well Wabasca, not too much in Wabasca."

Sam: "What about in Slave Lake here? See one of them that's most significant here, it was mentioned by Mrs. Bottle when we interviewed her in Athabasca, we've been at this a few days now, this lake used to be *Sipagimow*. *Sipigamow* means 'the end of the lake' in Cree. She wasn't sure which name had come first but then they called it *Ayacinôs Sâkahikan*. That's Slavey Indian Lake."

John: "They were here like a town and then the Cree drove them out."

Sam: "But they stole a lot of Cree women I heard too. They used to come at night, steal a woman and haul her away."

*Bob: "That Squaw Point there, during the 1918 flu, there's a burial ground there."

Sam: "Thirty of my relations lay there."

*Bob: "They were going to build a highway through there and somebody stepped in and stopped them to go around the cemetery."

John: "When we first come there was all little buildings in there. There must have been about nine buildings maybe ten, at Squaw Point when we first come. Louis and I used to go snaring fox or coyote. We used to come down that way in those buildings. Grandfather used to always tell, 'Don't go into those buildings because the people were sick.' Flu or something."

Sam: "Poison gas it was. First World War, it drifted over here. That's why they didn't use it in the Second World War because they killed so damn many innocent people. It drifted into the North. Even when my dad explained it to me I was convinced it was the poison gas they used even to train us before we went overseas. When you got a sniff of that you started throwing up, you were sick."

*Bob: "In 1918, it hit the States too where I was born in Idaho. Thousands of people died there."

Sam: "It drifted all over the world. It killed over five million people in northern Russia. That just came out."

*Bob: "It hit Idaho in Jefferson County where I was born but late. Did it ever hit the people. They were dying like flies."

Sam: "You know there was one statement that was made by Charlie Gullion. They said in 1918 they could see a cloud coming in. A portion of that touched down almost like that tornado in Desmarais. It wiped out families and families there but missed part of north Wabasca, nobody got sick in that area. But across from there is another little reserve they wiped out pretty well everybody there. Whoever was telling it said you could see it like a cloud because it's a vapour. Cold weather makes it settle down. It drops."

*Bob: "In the States, thousands of people died."

Sam: "They started using that towards the end of the war, the last year. They used barrels and barrels of that. Once it drifts it'll go all over the world. Mrs. Bottle said when that flu hit here in the Old Town she said old L'Hirondelle told them in Cree 'Don't touch any of those newspapers that come from a foreign land because he said there's sickness in them.' The other thing I'd like to ask you is, did you know anything about health care in those days?"

John: "There was no place to go. You had to do it at home. Try and help the person that's sick."

*Bob: "Here's one for you, if Mrs. Bellerose would have had a doctor or a nurse she would have been alive. That was your mother."

John: "My Grandmother said, 'If I was there, she would have been alive today.'"

*Bob: "What happened is, she bled to death. Bill was her dad. We hauled many a load of wood together. He had a team and we hauled them. We never seen you there. The only time I can remember seeing you was when you challenged, with a baseball, anybody that could out-pitch you across the river. You threw it clean across that river, you had pretty good weight."

John: "There was a time when people used to talk about me; a gambler. I was telling you about Harry Dupuis's daughter married a gambler. The old man, he come and we're on top of the hill. I was pitching. The old man said 'Could you hit that ferry across there?' Sure I said. 'Grandson', he said, 'I don't think you can do it, you better prove it to me right now.' I got a good rock and I hit the ferry. He said, 'You sure got me there. I never thought anybody could pitch across that river.'"

Sam: "Did you know any healers? People that knew a bit of Indian medicine. One that we know that saved my life is Mrs. Gladue. She was very keen on her Indian medicine. They used to also be scared of her."

John: "She could do witchcraft."

Sam: "She could do good medicine. I'll just remind you of what my mother told me in the Old Town there when I was born in 1926. I got pneumonia as a baby and a Catholic priest come and give me the last rights. Just then the old lady, Ned's mother walked in and said, 'I heard your baby is sick.' She asked my mother in Cree 'Can I have that kid and see what I can do?' My mother handed me to her and said, 'See if you can save him.' She went away and brought me back in three days and my mother said I was just like a brand new baby. My mother said, 'Never do any wrong to that lady, respect her, she's a great woman, she saved your life and

many others.' Even to this day I respect Ned. He's got some good medicine. He's got a lot of knowledge."

John: "My sister was very sick, we thought we were going to lose her, Victoria. She used to sit. Everybody said that's it and this woman came from Wabasca to Kinuso. This old lady heard this girl was sick so she come over to see my mom. She asked if she could help. She got her alive. I never thought I'd see my sister. My grandmother used to do a lot too."

Sam: "Even these midwives saved a lot of women. They were kind of 'pros' at it. One woman who has done a lot was Sophie Boisvert. She was a good woman."

John: "I was just thinking about some of those names you mentioned here like Wagner. A lady used to *wahganum* (in Cree: to bend), like building boats, toboggans. That's how they got that name. *Kinosew* is fish but the white man didn't know how to say it so it was Kinuso. I'll tell you a story about Faust. This guy was coming from Edmonton but he had a woman. . . . This guy was laying down just about asleep, he had to hang on to these seats because you would fall over. This guy jumped up and the someone said "What's the matter with you?". He replied "Oh, we're in Faust."

Sam: "Have you ever been called anything different than Indian, Half-breed? When you were born what were you labelled as?"

John: "Ya. My mom had a lot of French in her too. My dad he had lot's of French. He had about a quarter breed in him. He used to make ties at one time. I have his bandsaw, his Swedesaw. These buggers are long. I still have that at home. There was a lot of guys doing that."

Sam: "So were you called a Half-breed because I never heard this Métis thing until later on. Métis was a French Half-breed that's where that Métis come from."

John: "My grandfather and his brother came to St. Albert. This is how my grandfather had more land than anyone else because his brother took land up there and when he left he left it with my grandfather."

Sam: "I heard it years ago that your grandmother was involved with Dr. Belanger. They claim that's where Louis Savor come from. Do you know if there is any truth to that?"

John: "Louis didn't come from there. He was adopted. It's not my grandmother's son. He was adopted by my grandmother's relation somewhere."

Sam: "But was Louis truly the son of Dr. Belanger?"

John: "Well that's what they used to say. Smart man. Dr. Belanger used to tell me, 'I worked with your grandmother a long time and she's just about as good as any doctor.'"

Sam: "Do you remember when they used to have Treaty days—when they started giving that five dollars a year because that used to be like a sports day?"

John: "That was a big day, you could smell bacon for over ten miles away. It's a funny thing I was in Wabasca too and somebody said, 'John get into that Treaty. You'll get shells and be pretty well off.' So I thought that was a good thing so I put my name in anyway. Ballard, who was the Indian agent, said 'I can't do anything with you now but I'll look into your background and next year I'll see what I can do'. I waited until next year and then they come. I told the old lady and said, 'I'm going

to get a gunny sack and get beans, shot, powder, bacon. I'll have a good pack.' So I went, them guys was getting called up. Georgie Gullion signed up too and he got stuff before too. They were talking and I could see George and he took off and never got no bacon. They called me up. This was the time Bellerose was interpreting; "Suzwee" they called him from Grouard. He was sitting there and he said, "I'm sorry, you're not Treaty." So I went home and the old lady had the frying pan on the stove and I brought home the empty bag. She said, 'What happened?' I said, 'Some of those Indians followed me home and grabbed me and pulled me down and they took everything off me.' She said, 'John, you're a damn liar.' But it was still good because you could get "shot" and you could hunt ducks anytime. You had to have a remer(?) and you could go fish anytime."

Sam: "What was your leadership in your home? Were you both bosses or was it effective working as a team or was it more important having one boss?"

John: "We were both. Anytime somebody would ask me something I said, 'Okay, I'll go home first and let you know.' Then I would go home and ask the old lady and we'd sit down and talk about it. If she didn't think it was okay she'd tell me why she doesn't think it's right. We done it together. Like hunting, she used to go with me, ten miles sometime. She was just like a wolf."

Sam: "So you never got to be a political leader, being involved even in local politics?"

John: "Well, that way she didn't have too much to say. Like today with Clifford we talk about how to do things. I can't go and say we're going to do this. I got to let him know and see what he thinks."

Sam: "Were you ever involved with the steamboats when they used them for freighting? The only one I heard who was involved with the pulling of the boat was George Ferguson, Emile Sinclair, Samuel Sinclair and James. Old Louis Dominic and the Norris' as well. Or maybe you want to talk about your family. I never asked you how many children you have."

John: "Ten. We had ten, we lost one. But I raised nine, five girls and four boys. I think we have twenty grandchildren. I think we have about eleven great grandchildren."

Sam: "You didn't belong to any spiritual religious things? I remember your mother was a strong Catholic when she was young."

John: "I am Catholic and I believe in it. Sometimes I got on that boat, I ran boat for six years in Fawcett. I used to boom logs. Sometimes I didn't have anybody. I had to run on logs and unhook the chain all by myself. Sometimes I think I prayed. That's death right there. Did you know Johnny Maddy? I went to Fawcett lake to see Johnny. He's brain damaged. He was under a half-ton for an hour and a half. Someone had to tell the boss that Johnny's underneath the truck. It had rolled on him. So anyway I was visiting Johnny, he showed me pictures and gave me a few drinks of wine. I said, 'Johnny I should be getting back home my family will worry about me.' He said, 'They didn't worry about you when you were on that lake at night. I used to worry about you.' The wife and I would go out and we always had a little light on the boat. 'Is he there or is he in the water?'"

Sam: "It seems like there was always someone to help somehow when something went wrong. People had more care for each other those days."

John: "I was a policeman in Wabasca for seventeen years. Did you know George Arnold? He was a judge and the police. He was everything. We came to Slave Lake to get into commercial fishing. So we're going back and he's talking about where we come from like some say fish, some say we come from the monkeys. I said, 'Ya, George I said I think it shows on some of us. Look at you you're hairy all over, your chest and your arms. There's hair coming out of your ears, I think you didn't get to be a human.' Did he ever get mad. I was telling you about the time of the treaties. Well they caught this old Bigstone Chief making brew. He was staying at Sandy Lake. He said, 'John, you got to go down and give this guy a summons. By the way I have to give you this badge and when you leave here you are a policeman. If anything happens down the road you can do what you like.' So I got down there to see the old man and he had some good whitefish. We had supper. This Chief then said, 'Grandson you didn't come here for nothing did you? What did you come down here for?' So I gave him the summons. He said, 'I knew that but I don't want it.' But I was told that is what he would say so I showed him my badge and he took it."

Sam: "We just interviewed a ninety-six year old man named Alphonse Beaver from Sandy Lake. He was a brother to that Chief you mentioned."

John: "This old guy was asking about me. We went down the river and he wanted to know how we made out. Two young guys going down the river is very dangerous. We had to portage from the river to Trout Lake. The Trout Lake river was another tough river. This old man couldn't say my name Bellerose. He kept saying "bear nose." They used to laugh about it."

Sam: "But as much as they talked about that old judge, they said he used to talk to the Indians very strictly but he had a heart of gold. He never enforced what he said but he wanted to scare them into watching the law a little bit. Well is there anything else you'd like to add?"

John: "About work, Swanson's the longest I stayed anywhere. You're the guy that came and got me from there. You come to the mill and I was running a loader or something. You came and said, 'We'd like to get you to work with the forestry.' 'I'll tell you later,' I said. So I went to talk with Gunther, 'How long are you going to keep me Gunther?' He answered, 'Oh, not long we're going to shut 'er down.' I told him I could work for the forestry. 'Take it, here it's nothing'. So I did. Then I worked with Sam because he said he needed a driver. He'd sleep and I'd drive. Forest ranger."

Sam: "Then they got to work on the parks later. Him and George and Sidney."

John: "I worked on the parks for about twelve years. I did all the brushing there in the main campgrounds around Marten River. I took a contract. I was working for the forestry. I made all those stalls.

Sam: "Well that's good then, we want to thank you John for giving us a good story. Certainly we need these stories for people who want to find out about the history of Lesser Slave Lake. Again, thanks John."

Mrs. Melanie Bottle

Mrs. Melanie Bottle

Slave Lake, Alberta

November 1998

Sam and Edna Sinclair (standing),
Mrs. Bottle (seated)

Slave Lake, Alberta

November, 1998

Jeannette and Edna Sinclair
(standing)
Mrs. Bottle (seated)

Slave Lake, Alberta

November, 1998

Mrs. Melanie Bottle
in Athabasca, Alberta
Interviewed by Sam Sinclair
Translated and summarized by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 19, 1996

Sam: We are interviewing Mrs. Melanie Bottle who is almost ninety-four. She was born in Slave Lake and she went to school in Grouard. She completed up to grade four in a convent but she remembers most of the education was dedicated to religion.

Mrs. Bottle got married when she was twenty years old which was shortly after the war.

She lost her mother in nineteen-eighteen to the flu. She married Barney Bottle (who was working on the railroad) in Wagner in nineteen-eighteen. They lived in a railcar for one to two years while Mr. Bottle worked steadily on the railroad. Later they moved back to Old Town which is located in the Slave Lake area. Mr. Bottle built a house in this area close to where he lived in later years. He trapped on a part-time basis for extra money.

Mrs. Bottle mentions some of the animals that they used to trap. These included lynx, foxes and weasels but she did not mention squirrels which were popular in later years. She adds that game was always plentiful in those years (early 1920s) and there was enough animals to satisfy everybody.

Barney Bottle worked on the railroad approximately fifteen years. Mike L'Hirondelle was another native person who worked on the railroad. The jobs were scarce and many people were struggling financially but there always seemed to be enough food. Moose was one of the food sources for many people and Barney used to hunt as well. Hunting was more difficult in that time than it is today because of the lack of quick transportation and accessibility. Therefore it was considered somewhat of an art and the good hunters of the day always shared with those who had a difficult time finding game. These hunters had many skills to help them and relied on techniques such as tracking for their success.

Mrs. Bottle had twelve children of which four girls and two boys are still alive.

Towing boats from Athabasca to Slave Lake was an activity she remembers being involved with. James Dominic, her brother Harry, as well as her dad, Louis Dominic were some of the people who participated in this hard work. Others mentioned were Emile Sinclair, James Sinclair and Samuel Sinclair (uncle to our translator Sam Sinclair). These men had pride in accomplishing this hard work. The freight was transferred to the steam ships at the mouth of the river. Then the freight was moved on to Grouard. There were three boats that hauled freight at this time (approximately 1912).

Tom Lilac was one of the first white men to settle the area. Charlie Schurter was another of the first to settle. Charlie was a telegraph man when he arrived in Alberta (approximately 1912). Joe Hall and his sons, Joe and Reney were also early non-aboriginal settlers in the area. The land they owned was originally used by Felix Sawan.

Mrs. Bottle's parents used to live ten miles down the river from Old Town. They had some land on the east end of the Sawridge reserve. The land was previously occupied

by Johnny Stoney (approximately 1910). Her father's name was Harry Cardinal but he was better known by his Cree name which translates into English to mean "bright-eyes". Don Sinclair also had land in that area. Harry Cardinal used to haul freight from Smith to Slave Lake and spent time butchering and selling cattle. He was known as a good farmer.

Mrs. Bottle's mother's maiden name was Maria Gladue. She had problems with her eye and face which she attributed to bad Indian medicine. Maria married Mr. Cardinal when she was thirteen years old. The wedding was in Calling Lake and was performed by Father Lacombe.

Mrs. Bottle also recalls the 1918 'flu epidemic', which she states may have been poison gas that was used during the war. They lived ten miles east of Slave Lake on a small reserve during the 'epidemic'. She recalls seeing clouds of gas drifting across the country. The places where this gas settled were the places where people got really sick and died. One of the unfortunate victims of this 'epidemic' was her mother. Squaw Point was another place where the death toll was heavy. Herbs and other medicines were used to help some people regain their health while others found whiskey to be helpful. There was no hospitals or doctors present during the 'epidemic'. Mr. Hamelin, Felix Sawan and Philomine Giroux were some of the people who helped others using herbs and other medicines.

Entertainment was limited only by one's imagination and Mrs. Bottle remembers some of the good times she enjoyed. People used to sing and dance while using a broom to keep time. This of course was before most instruments were introduced to the area.

When asked about the leadership concerning the "Half-breeds", she commented that "everyone was on their own". Only the Treaty Indians had the leadership of a chief.

She also remembers a story about a certain Alphonse Delorme who one day found himself in jail in Athabasca. Harry Cardinal's older sister who was a widow with many children heard this news and decided to raise bail money. She then bailed out Mr. Delorme using her scrip money on the condition that he marry her. He agreed and they stayed together for years to come.

In the late 1920s Mr. Bottle started working for farmers and sometimes he got paid in butter. This was the time of low wages and the effects of the depression could be felt by all.

The south shores of Slave Lake was originally named by the Crees to mean "Slavey Lake" because the area was occupied by many Slavey Indians. Later it was just called Slave Lake by all.

When asked about the leadership in her own family she remembers her father as being the main decision-maker.

The graveyard by the airport is where Mrs. Bottle's mother was buried. Shortly after her death, Mrs. Bottle's father sold his land, barn, horses and cattle for five hundred dollars. He was later buried in Wabasca.

Most clothes were made from moose hide including dresses, jackets, vests, pants and moccasins. Later, when stores were introduced to the area, people were able to wear clothes made from other materials.

Mrs. Bottle's great-grandfather (Harry Cardinal's grandfather) was French and came from overseas. When he first arrived to this country he said most Indians hunted

wearing nothing but a loin cloth even in the winter. He said they took great pride in their strength, stamina, and hunting ability.

This concludes our interview with Mrs. Melanie Bottle and we thanked her for her time and for all the stories she shared with us.

Interview with Mrs. Melanie Bottle in Slave Lake, Alberta.
Interviewed by Jeannette Sinclair
Translator: Clifford Sinclair
Mabel Sloan, her daughter, assisted with translation
June 10, 1993

PERSONAL HISTORY

When were you born? September 2, 1902, ninety-one years of age
Where were you born? Slave Lake, AB
How many were in your family? She is the only surviving member of her family.
Where were your parents from? Lac La Biche area.
What were their names? Harry Cardinal and Mariah Gray.
What were your grandparents' names? She knows very little about her grandparents. Her grandfather had an Indian name, but she can't remember it. She had a picture of her grandparents somewhere. She hardly remembers them, but she heard of them a little bit.
Where were they from? Lac La Biche area.
Are you Métis or Treaty Indian? Métis. Somewhere way back they lost their treaty rights through scrip.
How long did you live in Slave Lake? She didn't live in Slave Lake all the time. She lived about ten miles east in the Mitsue area. Her dad raised cattle and a garden, and that's where she grew up. That's where Charlie Jackson lives now. His mother, Mrs. Jackson, is her sister.
When did they move to the town of Slave Lake? Her husband worked on the railroad, about seventy years ago. They moved to Mitsue, Spurfield and back to Slave Lake. They moved around a lot in the area because of where he worked. She raised four kids during that time.
How old were you when you got married? Twenty years old.
Does she remember arranged marriages? Their marriage was not arranged. Her mother died. Her father gave her away. They got married over seventy-one years ago.
Where did she meet Barney (her husband)? At a dance. He was working at Wagner—he's from Grouard.
Did they get married In Slave Lake? Yes, they got married in Slave Lake. They were married by a priest. They made their permanent home in Slave Lake. They had twelve children (eight girls and four boys). She raised four grandchildren.

BERRY PICKING

Did they do a lot of berry-picking?
MABEL: Oh God, yes, you better believe it.
CLIFFORD: She (Melanie) rode a horse berry-picking, my Mom and her.
MABEL: When the men were working, all the women gathered and they used to take horse and wagon and they'd all go berry-picking.
CLIFFORD: It was an outing. It was very common, every week. There was no end to going out somewhere—no leisure for us, we were always doing something.

HUNTING

Did Barney do any hunting?
MABEL: Yes, all we lived on was wild game. He was a good provider. They always had moosemeat. She (Melanie) used to kill rabbits, ducks, geese, and muskrats when her husband was working out of town.

MELANIE'S STORY:

(Ed. note: She told a story in Cree about hunting with her daughter when they had no meat).
MABEL: She said she woke up one of her daughters, Mabel, and took her hunting for geese. We could hear them. She had a double-barrel shotgun and she pulled both barrels knocking me and herself over. And then she jumped up and said, "Well, we probably didn't kill anything." And here, there was nine of them laying there. She killed nine with one shot. That was at Horseshoe Pond—that's where we went. We had a dog helping catch these geese.
Are you the oldest daughter?
MABEL: No, Lucy is.
But you went hunting that time?
MABEL: Well, she always woke me up. I don't know, I was always raring to go, I guess.
So the men hunted for the big game and the women for the smaller game?
MABEL: When Dad wasn't around, they did it on their own. He was a timber cruiser and his job took him out of town lots. He was up in Hinton and other places. She shot a moose, but she didn't kill it, she missed. It scared her, so she missed. But I know she brought a deer home once. She did manage to kill a deer once.
When they'd get an animal, was it just a family going by themselves or would a group of them go hunting?
MABEL: The men would go. Two or three would go in a family. Nobody hunted together at that time. Whoever got the game got it—and whoever missed out, they were missed out.
And so, they'd share it among their family? Yes.
When they got the animal, who would do the cleaning? Was that the woman's job?
MABEL: No. The men would clean it, but they would do the skinning. Then they'd make the hides. Then they'd make the dried meat.
If the men got the animal, would they come back (to town) and get their wives to go and do the skinning?
MABEL: They'd go out to the bush and set up a camp out there and the women would go out and then dry the hides and stretch them out to dry. They would make the hides and dry meat at the same time. They'd camp out there for about a week sometimes.
Would this be like a hunting trip where everybody would go?
MELANIE: Just the men. The men went first, then they'd come back and take everybody. And they did a lot of sharing.
So that meat would all get divided up among the family?
MABEL: Yes, relatives and friends.
CLIFFORD: We don't see too much of that any more. We've lost that.

Who would divide up the meat? Was that her (Melanie's) job?
CLIFFORD: Yes. She did everything like that. She was the one behind it.
When they were berry-picking, did she decide when and where to go?
CLIFFORD: Yes, she did all the decision-making. She said she remembers your grandmother, Mrs. Pierce. They'd come over to get dry meat. She said we're related through our grandmothers. (Mrs. Pierce's mother was a Chalifoux). On Barney's side there was a Chalifoux. Melanie was a Cardinal. We're all related. My grandmother (my mother's mother) was a Cardinal too, in Sucker Creek. She was a Cardinal before she married a Courtoreille.

FISHING

Did anybody fish?
MELANIE: No, they had no boats for that.
MABEL: They would buy fish from the White man.
CLIFFORD: She would fish ordinarily, but not with nets.
MABEL: There was lots of White men we bought fish from or traded with.
Did you ever trade moosemeat for it?
MABEL: Yes, or vegetables. We had a beautiful vegetable garden. We'd trade for fish and eggs.
Did they have cattle too?
MABEL: Yes.
Were the cattle raised to eat too?
MABEL: Oh yes, we butchered lots of times. If we didn't have enough meat, they would butcher. My dad would sell half of it and then we'd keep half.

LEADERSHIP

Did they always have a mayor in Slave Lake, or was it groups of people (who made decisions)?
(Melanie could not think of anyone who made the decisions).
MABEL: Charlie Schurter was sort of a spokesman for everybody.
CLIFFORD: They called him a "sheriff".
What about any Native people? Weren't there any Native leaders?
CLIFFORD: Half-breeds were more or less on their own, neutral.
MABEL: No one was bossing them. You lived like everybody else. Your neighbour could be White or anybody.
So they never really had a mayor or anything like that in this town, just a spokesman?
MABEL: No, I don't know who the first mayor was.
Did they ever have to make community decisions or were all decisions made individually by the families?
MABEL: It was mostly centred on the family, not from the community.
Within the family, who made the decisions?
MELANIE: The dad.
CLIFFORD: She said she was "put in the back". She said, (jokingly) in my family, the woman, my mother, was the boss and the man, my dad, was "put in the back".

Was that how it was in your family or was your dad, "the boss"?
MABEL: My dad got the last say in anything but most of the time my mother was on her own to look after all of us.
When Barney was away hunting and she had to make decisions for trading, would she do that with other women and other families?
MABEL: Yes.
CLIFFORD: It should be mentioned that she was a seamstress. She excelled in sewing.

CLOTHING

MABEL: She made beadwork and all kinds of things, mukluks, moccasins, jackets, and she would sell them to provide for the family. She's making picture frames right now.
Where did she learn to do all these things?
MABEL: In a nursing home for five days in Athabasca. She watched the other women sewing. They wanted her to stay because she's really good, but she only stayed for five days and she wanted to come home. That was just recently.
CLIFFORD: She had this natural ability before. She made a coat for my mom—wedding dresses—She made one for my sister, May.
Where did she learn how to sew?
MELANIE: My mother.
What about tanning hides, did she learn to do that?
MELANIE: Yes, my mother taught me how to tan hides.
MABEL: She's almost ninety-one and she can still make her own clothes. She just recently made a fancy dress and hat for her great-granddaughter's wedding.

MARRIAGE

When people got married did they go and live in their wife's community or the hushand's community or did they go and live on their own?
MELANIE: Just us. We went on our own.
CLIFFORD: It's different than a reserve.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Does she have any old pictures?
MELANIE: No.
MABEL: All of us kids got them—there's no one in town.
MELANIE: Someone interviewed me before and I gave them about ten pictures and she never came back. She went around doing what you're doing (interviewing).

MIDWIFERY

A long time ago, there were no doctors or nurses in town were there?
MABEL: No, there were midwives.
Was she ever a midwife?
MABEL: No.

CLIFFORD: Mrs. Mary McDonald, Margaret McDonald's mother, was the midwife.
MABEL: She was the midwife for mostly everybody.
Who delivered your kids?
MELANIE: Mrs. McDonald and Mrs. Loyie.

ILLNESS

What about when people got sick, what did they do?
MELANIE: There was no doctor. They used home remedies.
MABEL: They used roots and herbs from different trees and flowers.
Who used the roots and herbs?
MELANIE: Mr. Campiou from Kinuso was the medicine man.
CLIFFORD: Julienne Twinn, my aunt was also good at that. She always came down (to Slave Lake).

CELEBRATIONS

CLIFFORD: When somebody, like when Dad or their dad killed something, people and their kids were happy because we had meat or drymeat. We had lots to eat. That was a necessity. If we didn't have that meat, we had bannock and whatever vegetables. So it was a celebration—a happy time.
MABEL: Wherever we camped out, there was always people that came with their horses and buggies, horse and wagons to come and visit.
CLIFFORD: Especially New Year's and Christmas, people travelled from one house to another. That's all they did, visit and eat, especially if it was the festive season.
Did they do it in big groups like a big celebration, or did they go from family to family?
MABEL: Family to family.
CLIFFORD: Sometimes they had it in a certain place—maybe it was a dance—a lot of celebrations.
MABEL: We used to have what they called a box social. You give a boxed lunch and they'd raffle it off. And whoever brought that boxed lunch you made up, you had to eat with him regardless whether you liked him or not.
Is that how she met your dad? Was it that kind of dance?
MELANIE: Just a regular dance.
Did they have fiddle music?
MELANIE: Violin and guitar.
MABEL: This would last until about five in the morning sometimes.
Did they ever have tea dances?
MELANIE: Yes, in "Old Town". they had tea dances. They used to have a bonfire. People would gather and they'd have a tea dance around the fire. They used small drums.

RELIGIOUS GATHERINGS

What about Lac St. Anne pilgrimage? When did she start going there?
CLIFFORD: She said that her mother rode a horse and my grandmother rode a horse but the other people followed after.
That must have taken a long time to get there?
CLIFFORD: They always went early because they hunted along the way and made dry meat.
So the two women would go by themselves without the men?
MABEL: Yes, the older women went, not the kids. She didn't go until after she was married.
CLIFFORD: But she remembers her mother going and my grandmother, my dad's mother, was with them.
Did they use wagons?
MABEL: Horse and covered wagons.
MELANIE: "*Suppeetah*" used to go when he was a kid. He's in his eighties now—he's related. He'd go on a wagon and on horseback.
Did her husband go with her to Lac St. Anne?
CLIFFORD: Barney lived in residence, near Lac St. Anne. She said there were other people there already. She remembers seeing "*Suppeetah*" there.
MABEL: She said that they would all set up camp. . . .
CLIFFORD: Whoever you knew around, some place.
MABEL: The first time she went was after she had two kids and they went on a train. She said it was seventy years ago when Lawrence was small. She has gone every year since.
How did they get there afterwards besides using the train?
CLIFFORD: By a big truck, like cattle. That was a good ride though.
MELANIE: She hasn't gone for five years.
Does she still want to go?
MABEL: She would love to go, but there's no way to get there, no help. She'd have to have a bed to sleep in. She couldn't sleep on the ground because she couldn't get up. She would just love to go again.
Can she take the wheelchair?
MABEL: Yes, she would love to go.
CLIFFORD: They have a ramp, and it's paved right into the shrine. They never used to have that.
So she'd just need a camper or something to stay in?
MABEL: Or even a tent with a cot, as long as she was on something. If she was on the ground, somebody would have to help her up and everything.

EDUCATION

What about education? Did she go to school?
MELANIE: I went to the convent in Grouard. I rode on the steamboat both times.
How often did she go, once a year?
MELANIE: Twice.

How many years did she go?
MELANIE: Two years.
Did Barney go to school?
CLIFFORD: He's from that area originally.
Did he get more education?
MABEL: No, my dad was very smart without education.
Did they encourage men to get more education than they did the women?
MABEL: No, no one enforced it.
CLIFFORD: Indian Affairs had control. But the Métis had to pay. Some of the "Half-breeds" were made "Treaty" temporarily—like my mom had to pay. Danny had to go as a "Treaty" with the Twins, Mary Jane had to go with someone else. So the "Half-breeds" had it hard. The "Treaties" didn't have to pay.
When did they build the school in Slave Lake?
CLIFFORD: The school was right where I live in "Old Town".
So first everyone lived in "Old Town"?
CLIFFORD: And the surrounding area away from the settlement—it was a nice area.
MABEL: Then the flood came. Everyone moved to higher ground up here.
CLIFFORD: Everyone left ("Old Town").
Because of the flood?
CLIFFORD: Yes, in 1935.
Did you guys live where the cabins are along the lake, where Ebens live?
CLIFFORD: No, just up ahead by Nashes. They all lived along the ridges.
Did people own that land?
CLIFFORD: Yes, and there were White people too along the way.

THE 1918 FLU

What about the flu?
MELANIE: My mother died and four on my dad's side—from the flu.
Was that in 1918?
CLIFFORD: Yes.
MELANIE: When the flu came and the people died, they wrapped the bodies and put them in a big hole all together, no boxes, no lumber.
Where?
CLIFFORD: Where the airport is. There used to be a cemetery there. When they were building that airport, they came across these bodies and had to move them. I've seen that graveyard. Now I don't see any markers anymore. I don't know where it is now. They moved all the bones. Lots of people are buried there.
MELANIE: They put five in a blanket, all in one hole.
MABEL: A mass burial.
CLIFFORD: Like in the war—they couldn't keep up with the deaths.
Was it mostly the old people who were dying?
MELANIE: Everybody was sick.
CLIFFORD: She said they had some kind of medicine in bottles. They bought it from August L'Hirondelle's store.

MABEL: Some White guy came around selling it.
(We took a break and indicated we could come back the next day).

JUNE 11, 1993

(I asked that Mrs. Bottle share stories about whatever she felt was important to her.)
CLIFFORD: What do you want to talk about today?
MELANIE: I want to talk about Mitsue. There were a couple people who ate each other (like cannibals). There was an old lady who did all this eating. When I was young, I asked my mother what was wrong with this woman's mouth and my mother said she is a woman who ate people. We kept her for a year, as she had no place to live.

My mother told me a story about her: Everybody was starving except for three people—the woman's brother, her sister and this old lady. The men went hunting but couldn't get anything. There was no moose and no fish. People died from starvation. These people were cut up to eat. The other ones had to eat them too, not just the old lady. That's why they call Mitsue its name. It was an eating place. (Mîciso in Cree means "eat")

My mother told me when my mother's mother was an infant, people were starving in the bush. They had nothing to eat. Everybody was starving—my grandmother's dad, everybody. Just my grandmother and great-grandmother were left and she (my grandmother's mother) decided to leave. She took a pair of old moccasins with her and a pail. She carried my grandmother, (who was an infant at that time) and she stopped and gave her something to drink made from boiling moccasins. My grandmother survived because of that. She got to where there were other women and they took her in and nursed her back to health. She survived after all. That was a long, long time ago. She boiled these moccasins to get the liquid to nurse her back.

This story was told to me when I was young. It was about my grandmother when she was an infant and how she was nursed back to health by these other people. She was a very small lady. That's probably why she was small because she almost starved when she was young. It was long, long ago.

This is about the first time a White man came around here when I was a child and we lived in the Jack pines. He was a Frenchman—his name was Tom Lark. He had a beard. The Native people gave him a Cree name. In English, it means "Jack Pine Beard". Then Charlie Schurter arrived in Lesser Slave Lake. He was a telegraph operator. I was about seven at the time. Charlie's name was Charlie *Peewap'skos*. It means something to do with a telegraph. The next White man was Harry Braniff. He had quite a bit of land around here. He raised cattle a long time ago. He had a high forehead so his name in Cree meant "high forehead". There was a lot of Germans who came next, because of the war—Ebens, Bulshide, Teddy Weizer, Otto Theissen, Strehlau.

There was no bridge in Slave Lake. They had a Hudson Bay along the river. They had scows that were pulled by ten men along the riverbank. They brought food (with the scows). When they were getting closer they'd sing "Slave Lake smells" in Cree. People also made boats out of trees. They also made rafts because there was no other form of transportation. Three steamboats came, two big ones and one small one. One was called, "Hudson Bay Boat".

The boats used to stop by the sawridges in "Old Town" (known as Sawridge at that time). The boats carried the goods, and the people to Grouard. Some of the people

came from Athabasca. The boats went back and forth and we waited by the river side when the boats came in. They got raisins and prunes from the cook on the boats. Merchandise that you bought from the store was cheap at that time. For a dollar you could buy a lot of things. You could buy a three pound pall of lard for fifty cents. I used to do all my own canning: wild meat, fish and vegetables from the garden.

I made moccasins, jackets, mukluks, gloves, hides and other things to sell or trade. Other women did that too in order to change them for things at the store. Everybody talked Cree at home, nobody talked English. My husband was the only one who spoke English. When the kids went to school, they learned English.

Mr. Ned Gladue

(Left to right) Sam Sinclair, Ned Gladue and Edna Sinclair
Slave Lake, Alberta November 1998

Ned Gladue

Interview of Ned Gladue in Cree
Slave Lake, Alberta
Translated and summarized by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 1996

Ned Gladue lives in the town of Slave Lake. He has also lived in such areas as Wabasca, Sucker Creek, Driftpile, and many other reserves.

Ned remembers how food was preserved in the early days. Most of his diet consisted of moose and this meat had to be dried, as well as smoked, in the warm summer months. Later the meat was sometimes roasted or boiled before being eaten. Some of the meat was pounded with an axe or hammer after it was dry and brittle in order to make powdered *kâhkewak*. Fat was also taken from the moose to be used for later dates. Sometimes fat would be mixed together with some of the powdered *kâhkewak* and stored in baskets made of birch bark. Fresh meat was easily stored in winter months under deep snow.

Birch bark baskets were used in the autumn months to store berries as well. The baskets were sewn together by moose sinew or from bark from a willow tree. The basket was sealed with sap from a spruce tree.

Ned often lived in log cabins which were made of pine or spruce logs. The logs used to construct the cabins were often peeled so that they would not rot as quickly as regular logs. Ned recalls cabins made in the Fort McMurray area which used tar sands that would further preserve the wood used in the construction of log cabins. In the areas which did not have tar sands, moss was usually used to fill the chinks in the log cabins. The roofs usually consisted of hued down poles piled with dirt and moss.

Dog teams were a main source of transportation. In the winter months toboggans were hauled by these dog teams and they could easily pull the weight of a bull moose many miles. These same dogs were used as pack dogs in the summer months. Horses were also used but they were a little more rare in Ned's earlier years. Mainly one's own feet had to be used for most of the local trips. In winter months many people used snowshoes as well. The snowshoes were made from such materials as birch bark, rawhide and sinew. Sometimes trails were made in deep snow by making numerous treks in the snowshoes. The packed snow made travel a lot less difficult on foot or by dog team.

Ever since Ned can remember, Cree was the main language used and most everyone could speak it. French was also common in this time period (approximately eighty years ago) while English was the least common language of the area. There was also a lot of inter-racial marriages between the French and the Indian populations.

Ned recalls the use of smoke signals when he was a teenager in the Whitefish Lake area. He witnessed this ancient practice with his mother and an elderly Native man. He recalls that a certain fungus was used in this practice, which was quite effective when done properly. Ned points out that in his lifetime this was not a common occurrence.

Ned's mother was highly respected in the community as she had great skills in using many herbs and medicines. This woman had a nickname which translates to mean "darkness in the daylight" because of her dark skin colour. This lady was very spiritual and had a special relationship with our translator: Sam Sinclair. When Sam was an infant he

became very sick with what was probably pneumonia. He was so sick that the Catholic priest was summoned to give him his last rights. At this same time, Ned's mother arrived as well and asked about the health of the newborn child. She then asked Sam's mother if she could try to save him and his mother willingly agreed. Within three days the woman brought Sam back to his mother. Everyone could hardly believe how healthy he was, as the effects of pneumonia could hardly be seen. Sam grew up being told to respect this great woman as she was the one that saved his life. This is just one example of how Indian medicines were used and respected in the community.

When asked more about these Indian medicines Ned replied that the most benefit occurs when the patient believes in the power of the medicines. "One must have faith that the Creator will heal through these medicines". Otherwise it makes healing much more difficult.

Even to this day, Ned still picks certain herbs and roots. He remarks that it is important to pick them only during specific times of the year. As well, one must honour Creator for allowing us to have these great gifts.

Ned was also asked about the 1918 flu epidemic when his dad died. Ned was not with his father when that happened, but instead, was with his mother in a small camp. People were sick in that particular camp as well, so he followed his mother to Kinuso where he remained healthy throughout the ordeal. Story-telling was a popular past-time in Ned's earlier years. Many people sat together and told many stories while they smoked from their homemade pipes. The pipe was filled with tobacco and passed around. After smoking from the pipe it was expected, in some circles, that one must tell a story of fiction or of truth. In any case the stories were entertaining and many people were praised for their story-telling ability. When asked about the 1930s, Ned recalls times being easier in his region than in most other areas of the country. This was because most people still lived off the land rather than relying on the economic systems that prevailed in most of the more populated areas. There was plenty of moose, elk, and deer as well as other fur-bearing animals. Fresh meat and fish were often shared throughout the community. Cooperation rather than competition allowed for a more healthy and productive community.

Nets were used in many parts of Slave Lake and were very effective in producing whitefish, perch, walleye and jackfish. Snaring and spearing fish were also techniques used to obtain fish in some of the more shallow areas around the lake and in the streams and rivers.

In later years Ned also spent time working in a small sawmill. He recalls that they used to log on the north shore of Slave Lake. The trees were sent a few miles down the Slave River to a small mill. Many other logs were shipped all the way to Edmonton to be manufactured and processed. Later still, Ned worked in another mill in the Mitsue area.

Ned also spent many years fire-fighting, later becoming a foreman. His expertise in the forest made him a valuable asset in his field. He enjoyed the times he spent in the outdoors and even to this day spends a lot of time outside. Ned remains active despite his age and was involved with taking care of fire-fighting equipment for the Slave Lake forestry headquarters just three years ago.

There were many special elders that Ned recalls meeting. He states that there was numerous spiritual men that could do extraordinary things that many would call supernatural. He said he also knew of two women who had these same types of skills. One

of whom lived in the Wabasca area, the other in the Whitefish area. When he was about eight or nine years old his mother told him that if he wanted spiritual strength himself, he must be brave and stay in the forest for four days and nights by himself. He said he was very scared, but nonetheless, he went into the forest along with his mother and a bear rug for shelter. He recalls that when his mother left him alone, his fears seemed to fade and he felt he became a stronger individual.

When asked about leadership roles within families, Ned replied that a good model that he admired was the example set by our interviewer's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair. He said Mr. Sinclair was a strong man who was always willing to work and who was also a great hunter. He commented that Mrs. Sinclair ran a good household and had a lot of the responsibility in taking care of the cattle and horses. He remembers how when they first got married they had no material possessions but through hard work eventually owned about fifty head of cattle.

Ned wasn't yet born in 1899 (when the Treaties were signed), but recalls the annual presentation of five dollars to every Treaty Indian in the greater Slave Lake area. He says it was a chance for people to meet, since they often would not ordinarily see each other during the year.

Ned also notices a vast difference in the behaviour of today's youth as compared to the days when he was a young man. In his day, most young people were very disciplined and followed the words of their parents very carefully. They were expected to listen to their parents up until the time they got married. Ned contrasts that reality with today's youth whom he sees as undisciplined and disrespectful.

Ned Gladue was born a Treaty Indian. While living in Sucker Creek, Ned was told by an Indian agent (named Leroux), that his dad, himself and his brother were not Treaty Indians even though all of his dad's brothers and sisters still had their Treaty rights. This agent advised them to move to the Slave Lake area where he said he would help them in any way that he could. So Ned and his brother moved to Slave Lake (sometime in the 1940s). Upon their arrival, they built a couple of buildings which now would be in the west end of the Sawridge reserve. The Indian agent did provide some help by getting them a rake and a mower so that Ned, along with his brother, could hay for their horses. Just a few years later a man by the name of McCrimmon (representing Indian Affairs), came to tell them again that they were not Treaty Indians and made them tear down their own buildings into a pile and leave the reservation. They then left the reserve and were given twenty dollars for their troubles. This is just one example of how many of the Indians were treated in the earlier years by the Canadian government.

Although Ned Gladue has lived a life filled with hard work and discipline he recalls most of his life with only fond memories and happiness. Ned continues to be a positive influence in his community keeping himself active and healthy. We thank Ned for his memories and his wisdom and appreciate the time he gave us in this interview.

Interview of Ned Gladue (Interview conducted in English)
Interviewed by Jeannette Sinclair
Slave Lake, Alberta
June 4, 1993

HUNTING/FISHING/PICKING BERRIES

I am interested in how people made decisions around Slave Lake in the old days. For example, who decided when or where to go hunting or picking berries? Picking berries, most of it, the women looked after that not the men. Hunting, that's different. The men looked after that business—it used to be years ago. Hunting most of it—the man—no work that time. He had to go hunt or fish or snare rabbits or hunt for chickens. Fishing sometimes, when they got a chance. That time it was pretty scarce for the nets. The women used to make the nets by hand. I saw it myself.
Who did the fishing—the women or the men? Men.
The women just prepared the nets? Yes, that's the way at that time you know. Well, each kind, there's a different idea—some men and women. Always thinking about hunting for the man, like where's the best place to go for hunting. And the women were making dry meat and making racks for the dry meat. That's the way she looked at it for old women. And she wanted to know where to go picking berries. But now, only once a year for that in the Fall time. But the man, hunting, anytime, used to be. It was wide open. No game warden— nobody to look after the game—like free country it used to be. But now the government they hold us and everything. You got to have a license to get something, not like before. I remember that even myself I could kill a moose anytime without a license. I stayed at Marten River. That time there was no game warden—only once in a while he came up there. Only once in a while you saw forestry guys but not too many. Once in a while they came up there. And they had horses at that time—pack horses and riding horses. No vehicles at that time. That time there was no game warden. You can hunt anytime.
You were talking about old timers—not selling meat to anybody for money. You could trade that meat for groceries. They gave you something: bread, lard, something like that. You could give them some meat, trade it—not for money.

LEADERSHIP

Do you remember when you were young, did they always have a chief and council on your reserve? Yes, only one chief in Driftpile, Francis Willier. Used to be one chief, but he died. After he died, at Kinuso, his young brother took over, that Willier, that one is a chief. Every reserve, one councillor. Like here, in here (Slave Lake), that Twin, Brasowee *Neesohcheesis*—that's "Twin' in Cree—that was the only one councillor in here—Paul Twin, his brother, the oldest one.
He was a chief, Paul Twin? Paul Twin was a councillor. He was a chief one time after that.
After he was a councillor, he became a chief? Yes. It used to be no chiefs. Only one chief in Driftpile—the rest of it all councillors. One councillor in here (Slave Lake)—one councillor at Kinuso—they called him *Eckseenees*. I don't know his first name, that old

guy. And Johnny Calliou at Sucker Creek, a councillor. Only one chief at Driftpile and one councillor there too at Driftpile—eight reserves, only one councillor, no chiefs. Not like today. Years ago (it was) like that. But now how many councillors in one reserve—about three, four, five? That's no good.

How did they decide who was going to be chief in the old days?

Well, you know they all picked—the people, you know, which one's the best to help the people. But you know when you get the chief, you're Chief (for a) lifetime. You die—you get another chief. Not like today, every two years, get a new chief, new councillors—that's different old days. When you get the councillors, they council all the time, the lifetime. Now it's different today. That's all mixed up now.

Did women ever lead in the old days or was it always the men who led? Always the men—but now today lots of councillors—women.

So in the old days, what made a good male leader? What did you look for in a person if you wanted them to be a leader? Well, that time you know, it's kinda hard to explain what's good. They're just thinking about that, not like the meeting you know. You're just talking about one—what he think about it—like somebody come and see you, what you think which one's going to take the chief or councillor. You go to different places like that—not at meetings you know. That's why it's hard to know what's supposed to be.

Were there certain families in the community who were seen as good leaders? Yes.

What kind of families were they? Some people if you talk to him, he won't take your word. He won't even listen to you. That days it's kinda hard. He don't believe nothing. Not like today, if he (somebody) tell you something, you want to listen good which one you think be the best. But that days everybody, well they figure they don't think much of it, like, "I don't give a damn." They figured nothing going on. Hard to explain to anybody what's supposed to be good. But not like today—pretty near everybody knows what's supposed to be good. Lots of good education for the people—but that time, no school much. Hardly anybody talk English—mostly in Cree language.

Did the leaders have to be good hunters? Have to. The man you like, if good, the people like you—everybody's friend. Sometimes, go to another guy's place, tell him what's supposed to be good, what (he's) supposed to do. That's a good leader. Some people, they don't care about you. If he knows something he won't tell you. Some people kind of jealous, but some of them good people, you know. The good people, they'll tell you what's supposed to be good. They can go to your place or different places and tell them what's supposed to be good—what to do for hunting, mostly hunting that time, not much work.

So they probably had to be good hunters to know where to go and things like that? Yes, he knew where to go and show him where the best places to go—that time, only horses.

And so people who wanted to help other people, would be good leaders? Yes, trying to help other people, what they're supposed to do. Well, you call them a good leader.

People who were fair? Yes.

MARRIAGE

In the old days when people got married, did they have arranged marriages or did you pick your own wife? Most of the time, old timers—an old man here and an old lady here—his daughter—and a man here and his wife—he's got a boy. And that old people talking about to see if they can get married, them young people. If they're satisfied, them old people—now he told him (about getting married). Because old people—that's the boss, not that young girl. That's the boss—that old lady and old man. Same thing, that boy and his mother and his dad—that's the boss. Now if he thinks that to get married—okay he going to marry my daughter, he told that lady. Well then, that boy have to say "yes", because his dad give him away already—them people get married. Not like today, which one you like, you pick your own self—that days, no.
So the grandparents and the parents decided? Yes, they decided what they're supposed to do.
And they had no choice then? They got no choice. That man if he don't like that girl, you got married, because the old timers—that's the bosses. That's the way it should be.
Is that how you were married, Ned? No.
Did you pick out your own? Yes.
When did they stop that—arranged marriages? When did the old people stop picking them out? Well that time, I was twenty-one when I got married. At that time it was all over already. You have to pick your own.

PERSONAL HISTORY

What year were you born? I don't know because they all burned out, my baptism papers. Nobody knows how old I am.
Didn't you (recently) get your baptism certificate or your birth certificate? Yes, but they're wrong. But that's all right. We have to accept it. I can't see me and Azlick (his eldest sister) about the same age now.
How old is Azlick? She's about eighty-eight or eighty-nine—something like that. And my brother, Gabe, is about three years behind. And my sister, she died, about three years younger than my brother, Gabe. And then myself. About eleven years older than me, Azlick. But that paper say we're the same age now.
So you were the last (youngest) one? I'm the last one. Now, how can the same age—Azlick and me? It's all mixed up like that but I don't care. I accept it.
Is your other brother and sister still alive or is it just you and Azlick? Just me and Azlick.
What does Azlick say? How old does she think you are? She never says anything—but she knows I'm the youngest in the family. Anyway, (it's) all mixed up.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

So you picked your own wife then? Yes.
When you got married, did you go and live with your wife's family or did your wife come and live with your family? No, we just moved right away. We had our own place. We never stayed at anybody's place. I had my own place right away.
Which reserve did you live on—yours? Desmarais. After, we moved from there to Sucker Creek.
And where was your wife from? Desmarais.
But you got your own place in Desmarais? Yes.
And then how long did you live there? About twenty years.
What about your other brother and sisters — when they got married did they stay in Sucker Creek or did they move away? No, Azlick stayed in Slave Lake all her life.
Was her husband from Slave Lake? Yes, and my brother, most of it stayed in Sucker Creek. He's married to a Sucker Creek woman, Johnny Calliou's daughter. He married that councillor's daughter—and they stayed in Sucker Creek that time.
What about your other sister—did she move? No, most of (the time), she stayed in Wabasca, I guess. I don't remember. She died.
Were both of your parents from Sucker Creek? Yes, my mother come from Desmarais but we moved down there to Sucker Creek.
Did your parents and grandparents tell you that when you got married you had to live with the wife's family or did they say that the wife had to go live with the husband's family? Well, you just think about you—which way is best. You don't have to tell anybody because you're your own boss.
You decided yourself? Yes.
So even if a marriage was arranged, you still decide for yourself where you want to live? Yes.
Did you live in Slave Lake? In the "Old Town"—not in this new town. Nobody lived in this town here—no people in here—just a station and one log house. Most of them stayed in "Old Town." There was a church in there at "Old Town." There was one priest there called Father Patour.

RELIGION

When you and your wife got married, did you get married by a priest? Yes.
So most people got married by priests? Yes, most of (them). We got married by a priest in Wabasca. I forgot his name.
Did your parents get married by a priest? Yes.
Catholic? Yes.

MEDICAL PRACTICES

Were there doctors and nurses in the area? No doctors, them days—only one doctor, only at High Prairie, Dr. McIntyre. And some place like Kinuso, one nurse in there. I think one at Athabasca and one at High Prairie—not too many nurses that time.

What about Wabasca—did they have one? Nothing.
So when the women had babies, did they just have midwives? The old timers they know how to do that. Never go to hospitals—no hospitals that time in Wabasca—nothing.
What did they do if people got sick then? Well, no place to go. Indian medicine they used. There was no doctor, no nurse, nothing.
Who looked after them with Indian medicine—was it women or men? Both of them. Some of the men are good for Indian medicine. Some of the old ladies—good for Indian medicine too. Like my mother, she was a good one too. I know how—quite a few things for Indian medicine myself—from my mother. She showed me what to do—what to use for what kind of sickness you got—or if you got flu or some kind of sickness you got. That's why I pick out (medicines) for my mother—she showed me which ones to use. You go up there in the bush, lots of times. I know where she's standing, that's the medicine we're going to take—pick out the roots, put tobacco first before you pick them up. Now she'll tell you this one's supposed to be for what kind of sickness you have. You use that one and different ones maybe not only one, sometimes two, three different ones you mix together—like if you got bad flu, rheumatism or if you got TB (tuberculosis).
Did they (anyone) practice bad medicine too? Well, there's some bad medicines but not too many people—they don't care much about that. Some of them, they're bad people, maybe they can try and know what's supposed to be—but not too many people like that. Most people friends with everybody because when I remember myself, not too many people in Slave Lake here—you can count them—maybe fifty, maybe not even fifty. Not like today. Now, just like sandflies—too many in Slave Lake.

ABORIGINAL STATUS

Were most of the ones who lived here — were they "half-breeds"?
"Half-breeds" and some "Treaties"—not too many "Treaties". Twins, you know they lived over there by the lake. But they don't belong to that reserve. After that they found out that their reserve over there a little ways you know—it's more reserve. And the other one, Wards, used to live in there too. Before get that land in there, that poor man, from him, Jean Potskin is in that place. That Wards they had for to get reserve—that's where she make that reserve in there. And (their) names, Ambrose Ward and *Sambuchees* (John-Baptiste) Ward and *Alouie* Ward—three— them brothers they get that reserve. But all of them they died now. And after, still one old man still alive and his boys—they moved to Driftpile. He died over there and his boys too. Nobody lives on that reserve. And *Alouie* told us to come over here and move and gonna give us some. . . . like hoe, and rake and plough and harrows to make a living in there.
He told you to come and live there? Yes, that's why we moved here. That's why we stayed in there. My brother and my mother moved in there too—stayed in there about five years. And after that he told us—my dad—he can't stay on the reserve. But we were "Treaty" at that time—we should stay in there—he can't move us out for nobody because we're "Treaties". That's how we lost our Treaty. He told us, "No more Treaty, you guys."
Which one told you that? Leroux, a Frenchman.
Who was he? That's a Frenchman—I think he came from Fahler—used to be he looked after "Treaties".

Like an Indian agent? An Indian agent.
He told you guys you had to move? Yes, he found out my dad is not. . . .I don't understand that—all my dad's brothers are all "Treaty" in Wabasca—and his sisters too. How is he the only one not "Treaty"? Too old that business—I don't remember nothing about that. Even I don't remember my dad—maybe I saw it but must be I'm just a boy—just a little kid. I don't remember my dad. So we moved (to) that reserve in here (Slave Lake) and we got kicked out from that reserve too. Now that's the one I'm going to open it next Saturday, not tomorrow, next Saturday. That's where we're going to camp in there.
So when that Leroux told you that you weren't "Treaty" any more, did they take away your Treaty rights? No, they just stop[ped] us for no more Treaty—but now I got my Treaty rights back.
When did you get them back? Not too long ago—I wait for my card to come. Maybe today or anytime. I filled out everything. I was told, "You're Treaty long time ago—should come down long time ago and get your card."
So for quite awhile then they took away your treaty rights? Yes, oh, 1941 they took it away from us. Now if someone knows how to work on it, I can get my treaty money back—the one I lost. I never took it—well, not very much—five dollars a year.
But from 1941 to 1992 or whenever you got your treaty rights back, that's quite a few years—over fifty years at five dollars a year? That's $250—bingo money (laughs). No, I don't care much for bingo now.

HUNTING

When people used to hunt—you were talking about when the men would go hunting—did they go one at a time or did they go in groups? Well, sometimes they didn't want to stay together. Sometimes two, three guys stayed together—go out camping—know where the best place is to hunt. Some people knew the best place to go hunt. That's the way it goes—the people together all the time.
So what did they do when they got something—when they got an animal? Well, they used to have horses—carried it home—and made dry meat. No deep-freezes at that time. Your meat would rot if you didn't dry it.
And who dried the meat—the women or the men? The women—that's their job.
Who divided up the meat? Well, it's divided by those people, you know, the ones who killed it. (The hunter would) give so much to his partner—and so much for himself. That's the way they divided it—how much the people used. Some of them had big families—that one can get more. Same thing like fish, you know—somebody if he gets quite a bit of fish—that big family, they get a little more. That's the way to make a living for the people.

GARDENING

Did they have gardens? Do you remember them having gardens?
Everybody had gardens, it used to be—even some people got no horses, they used a shovel to dig it up. It was lots of work—not a big garden—but a small garden. But some of them, they had horses and ploughs, they could do it better. Everybody had gardens before.

Who did the gardening—the men or the women? I think they worked together. The man mostly did the dirt working and the women did the gardening.

GENDER ROLES

What about picking berries—did just the women do that? Sometimes the men, they helped too.
And the kids? And the kids too, yes.
When the kids were young, did the boys do different things than the girls did? Oh, yes.
What did the boys do? I think most of it the girls did better. The boys just like to play just for fun.
So the boys played and the girls worked? Yes. The girls mostly did something better. Instead the boys always tried to hunt chicken or birds or anything with the arrows, but the girls— more quiet.
And what did the girls do? Did they do the housework? Oh, yes.
And cook the meat and make dry meat and stuff? Yes, and they did more housework, the girls.
Did your mother and your sisters still tan hides? Oh, yes.
Did the men have to do anything there? Well, sometimes they helped. Mostly men tried to do work outside. Sometimes when they're making dry meat, the men haul it out for the women.
Lots of work there, isn't it? Yes, but you have to do it, otherwise you're going to rot your meat. You have to dry meat to keep it longer, and mostly in the Fall time when they're hunting and the moose is right in season. That's the time they stayed in the bush and made dry meat. When they came out from the bush they had to buy gunnysacks and put dry meat in there—get air on both sides so it won't rot.
Did they just leave it dry or did they pound it? They hung them up—made a little warehouse or shed, put the nail in there, and string, and tied it up in that gunnysack—hang up—both ways, all over the place—the air goes through the gunnysack.
Did they pound the meat very much then? That time, oh yes, lots of people they pounded meat. That's the only way we could keep it longer too.

DECISION MAKING

When we were talking earlier about when decisions were made in the community—were they made by that one chief or one councillor or did they go and talk to different people about things? How did they make decisions? Well, different reserves, like this one reserve here, only one councillor—and Kinuso, only one councillor. He can't go different place to tell them what to do because that's not his people. Like this in here belongs to these "Treaties," to tell them what's supposed to be—that councillor. And different reserves, you can't go up there and tell them what to do—them "Treaties"—there's a different boss in there already.
Did those councillors ask the people what they wanted or did they just tell them what they were supposed to do? Well, he can go to his place to look at what he needs (for) help. Now that councillor have to tell the Indian agent what the reserve needs—gotta

be that councillor to do that—gott a help somehow, especially, like big families—that days, no work, no welfare. If you not m ake your own (living), do something, your family is going to be starving. You have to do something, try to do something for your people, for your family. No welfare that time. Nothing to help you. You gotta do it yourself. Well one good thing that time, it was clear, the country—you can (be) free. You can go hunt without a license. You can go fish without a license. You can kill ducks without a license, and chickens. Now rabbits, always open year round without a license. Even today without a license you can kill rabbits anyti ne—only one animal I know, the rabbit. The rest of it, you get a license now. Today, you can't kill a chicken— the game warden, you'll get fined. But that days, nothing—free. Now it's quite a bit different today. The way I figure it myself, talking about the people and hard times years ago, no, wrong. That was free country that time. You're just (on) your own. If you're smart, you make a good living. Like that time you burn wood and coal oil, it don't cost you much. At the end of the month, you never get no bill to pay. You're free. And you got your own house. Nobody can give you a house. You have to make your own, no matter what kind—a poor one—you gotta live in there—can't help it (laughs). Well the way I figure it myself, it's a better life, used to be. Now today, you haven't got no money, what are you going to do? They kick you out—the government or somebody (laughs). It's not a good life nowadays—hard life now. If you're not doing any good, you're starving. Where are going to live? Where are you going to sleep? They're going to take away your place if you can't pay for it—sleep outside in a spruce tree? You'd freeze. That days—better life—used to be.

EMPLOYMENT

What did you do for work back then? Well, a lot of things, different kind of things. Sometime I work railroad, sometime I work in the bush for logging, sometime work for firefighting, all together. Most of it, I work for rangers. That's why I pick up a little bit, I can talk English.

EDUCATION

Did you go to residential school? No, I never go to school. My wife, I think, go to school. She can talk English pretty good and she can read. Myself, I can't read, nothing. I never go to school myself. I used to work all the time in my life (for) White people. That's why I pick up a little for myself—talk English.

Did your brothers and sisters go to school? I think so. Just me, mostly, stay in the bush all the time (in) my family. My mother all the time stay in the bush. No chance to go to school—that's bad for me.

Did you ever want to go to school? Oh yes, but didn't have no chance.

LANGUAGE

Did everyone talk Cree in your family? Oh yes, all of them.

Did they teach their kids how to speak Cree too? Yes, grandchildren too. You know, like Sam, your dad, he's an Indian. I don't know how you guys, you don't know Cree. You're mother's different. She's a White woman, your mother. (laughs) [Ed. note: my mother's Indian status was passed on through her mother even though her father was an

American]. But you know, you can talk Cree, you guys. Your mother could talk Cree and your dad too.

But they didn't teach us. No, but that's bad that way. That's no good. Look, all my family talk Cree just like me—because I talk Cree all the time. I understand English too but I never use it. I'm not a White man. Well I can't say much to other people—tell them what to do. I'm not the boss for that. But the way I think myself, it's no good. If he's an Indian, he should talk Cree, use his language.

Mr. John Houle

&

Mrs. Delphine Houle

(Left to right) Sam Sinclair, John Houle, Edna Sinclair and Delphine Houle
Wabasca, Alberta November 1998

John and Delphine Houle

Interview of Mr. John Houle in Cree
Wabasca, Alberta
Translated and summarized by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 1996

John lives in the Wabasca area with his wife, Delphine. They are also accompanied by a grand-daughter at this time.

Both John and Delphine are familiar with the many kinds of traditional clothing that are common in the area. Delphine is quite talented at making moosehide gloves as well as moccasins. She has sold much of her handiwork to people in the area but she also has given many items to her family and friends. This has kept her very busy throughout the years as she has fifteen children and many grandchildren. John and Delphine once owned a store in Wabasca and this was where Delphine sold a lot of her clothing. Mr. and Mrs. Houle also sold fur, examples include: beaver, muskrats, weasels, squirrels, otters, and lynx.

Berry picking was also an important event in the Houle's lifestyle. Native medicines were also gathered including rat-root which is a common multipurpose medicine of the area.

Mr. Houle was five years old when his mother died. He then spent the rest of his youth with his father. They spent a lot of time in the wilderness, sometimes staying all winter. The first trip John remembers (approximately 1938) was with his father which started in October and ended with their return in March. They were also accompanied by three Cardinal brothers and together they had three dog teams. The only time they had an external food source was when John's father hired a bush plane to deliver supplies. They lived mostly on bannock, moose meat, rabbits and other available animals. This area that they hunted and trapped is called Birch Hills. It lies somewhere between Wabasca and Fort McMurray. They also travelled to such places as Nemuir Lake and Moose Lake both of which are by small reserves. They were eventually successful in trapping lynx, weasels, mink and foxes. Squirrels did not come into demand until later dates. Mr. Houle's Native language is Cree. However he was also familiar with some of the French language as his father was a French Halfbreed. John's father was named Samuel Houle. John also fondly remembers his grandfather who was able to speak seven languages. One of these languages was probably Saulteaux as John's grandmother was a Saulteaux Indian.

John recalls his father being familiar with many of the Native healing techniques. Mr. Samuel Houle learned a lot of his medicinal knowledge through his mother who was skilled with medicines as well as being a distinguished midwife.

Mr. Houle also remembers the 1918 flu epidemic. He recalls how some people were healthy in the evening and by morning they were dead. He is not certain what caused the many deaths that were abundant during that time period but he suspects that poison gas may have been responsible.

It was in 1927 that John remembers the first hospital being established in the Desmarais area. A doctor arrived in the area in the early '30s and he helped save the life of a baby named Simon Cardinal. Mr. Cardinal now manages the Wapahoo Motel.

John spent limited time in the Wabasca mission. He recalls the French influence of the mission being attributed to the many French teachers present at that time. A Protestant mission with a greater English influence also existed during that time period just five miles north. Even to this day, a subtle language difference can still be found between elders in both areas. Eventually, the missions closed (approximately in the late 1950s) to make way for new schools.

Although a formal education can be very beneficial, success is not limited to those who attend post-secondary institutions. There exists some residents of Wabasca who have been successful despite a limited education. Denny Cardinal relied on his own entrepreneurial skills to run a store, trade furs and eventually own a small contracting business. Eric Auger is another resident of Wabasca who has been very successful in logging despite barely being able to read or write.

Storytelling was a popular past-time in John's earlier years. Barney Bottle, George Ferguson, Paul Twinn and Albert Twinn are some of the more well known storytellers of the Slave Lake area according to Mr. Houle. The stories told were sometimes a blend between fiction and reality but they usually always contained humour. Storytelling also produced such legends as WTsahkicak and Bigfoot which many people consider to be mythical.

Mr. Houle also talked about the negative influence that alcohol had in his community. He has seen many people struggle with alcoholism including two of his sons who died in alcohol related accidents. One son died in a car accident while the other died in a fire. Sadly, the negative effects of alcohol and drug abuse are still present in the area today.

The 1930s were known as the 'hungry '30s' to some but that wasn't the case for John Houle. Most of the residents of Slave Lake and surrounding area were not terribly influenced by the depression because they mostly lived off the land. Gardens were abundant in the community and they were a good supplement to the main diet of moose and other wild game. Even to this day, John and his wife maintain a small garden which provides them with potatoes and other fresh vegetables.

John began commercial fishing in the early 1940s. He also began buying fish and distributing them throughout Slave Lake, Faust and other areas. John also remembers working briefly for Swanson Lumber company (which was situated in the Slave Lake area). As well, Mr. Houle also spent some time firefighting. As a firefighter he recalls hard work and a diet that consisted mainly of rabbit, beans and bannock.

In 1955, Mr. Houle along with his wife Delphine, began the operation of a small store. The store was very successful and employed many people until it's closure in 1972. In the earlier years of the store's operation Mrs. Houle had to make the lengthy trip to the store by horseback or by foot. Through the success of his business Mr. Houle maintained a healthy lifestyle and owned such things as buffalo, horses and a small plane for the transportation of his fish. He also bought land from the Catholic mission (some of which he still owns to this day). Mr. and Mrs. Houle attribute their success to perseverance and hard work as well as co-operation and teamwork. John exclaims: "As long as I'm busy I'm going to live awhile."

When asked about his involvement with Native spirituality Mr. Houle replied that he never was directly involved with it (being a Christian) but he does respect all religion.

Although John was not a strong believer in church, his wife was, and she attended church as many Sundays as she could.

This concludes our interview with Mr. Houle and we thank him for his time and for all of the stories he shared with us today.

Interview of Mrs. Delphine Houle
Wabasca, Alberta
Interviewed by Sam Sinclair
Translated and summarized by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 20, 1996

Mrs. Houle was a hard worker and had many daily responsibilities throughout her life. For many years, she, along with her husband John, owned and managed a store in Wabasca. Delphine also contributed to the success of the store by making and selling moosehide gloves and moccasins. Often, Delphine would make her clothing for free and give it to her many family and friends in the Wabasca area.

Delphine's husband John also likes to remain active but he has to be careful when involved in physical labour because of a heart ailment. To this day, the couple remain busy raising cattle to supplement the income they receive from their pensions. Both Mrs. and Mr. Houle believe that an effective way to achieve good personal health is to stay busy.

Mrs. Houle learned about hard work when she was young. She was raised by her parents with discipline and a lengthy supply of chores. Sometimes, Delphine would help her father on the trap- line. She learned about "haying" with her sisters and her one brother. Delphine also spent time in the garden and would often have to pack potatoes and other produce once they were ready for harvest. Mrs. Houle recalls that in those years people were very receptive to helping others in the community. If a person had extra seed from their garden they would pass it along to someone who did not have any. Even though many people had financial pressures they survived as a community through co-operation and kindness. She is not regretful about how she was raised but instead appreciative because she feels that she was made a stronger person because of it.

Mrs. Houle does not have many memories of her grandparents as they died when she was quite young. She does remember, however, that her grandmother was an excellent midwife. She recalls how people would come to her grandmother in the middle of the night asking for help. Her grandmother would simply grab her medicine bag and proceed to offer her services. Again, this shows how communities shared commodities whether it be food, clothing or experience.

Mr. and Mrs. Houle presently live on land located approximately thirty miles away from Wabasca on Wabasca road. Mrs. Houle recalls that when they were first interested in obtaining the land they were unable to find anyone with the authority to sell it to them. They eventually decided to go ahead and settle on the land with or without land rights. They fenced off some land and began various development such as "haying". In approximately 1921, Mr. and Mrs. Houle obtained owner/lease status on a half section of land in that area.

Mrs. Houle recalls that in the earlier years in Wabasca there was no such thing as income tax. Most of the work that was done involved making trails for wagons and sleighs. Later, "freighting" was done on contract to the Hudson Bay Company and for the missions as well. Joe Gagner was one of the individuals involved with "freighting". He used a team of horses to deliver goods to the mission in the Slave Lake and Wabasca

areas. It took approximately four days with a full load and three days with an empty load to travel the Wabasca/Slave Lake route.

Other types of employment opportunities existed also. For example, Mrs. Houle's father owned a livery barn and charged one dollar per night for use of the facility. This consisted of a bunkhouse and food and shelter for a team of horses. There was three of these barns located between Wabasca and Slave Lake.

Mrs. Houle also spent time in a mission. Time spent in the mission was often filled with many hardships. Delphine remembers having to eat jackfish three times a day for extended periods of time. The jackfish was cooked in an oven with only the head removed leaving the "guts" still inside the fish. Mrs. Houle once went without food for a week in protest of the conditions. Her father heard of this news and promptly brought some moose meat for his daughter to eat. Delphine never did see any of the moose meat that was intended for her. Clothes that were donated from other towns, intended as give-aways for the poor were instead sold to some of the richer families in the Wabasca area. She was also witness to the abuse and neglect of fellow students. One of Delphine's close relations was beat up and then had her tongue burnt by fellow classmates because of false accusations and rumours. Other kids were strapped behind closed doors for committing minor infractions. One boy was stripped naked and strapped in front of the group for allegedly stealing a watch. Racism was also prevalent even amongst the nuns and priests. Most of this racism was directed towards the Native students in the group. Mrs. Houle remembers one nun who spoke out against such abuse but little was done to improve the conditions of the missions for many years.

Together, John and Delphine have survived through many types of adversity throughout the years. Hard work and determination have given them the strength they needed to prevail the many difficult circumstances that they faced together. Delphine maintains that there was no one head of the household but rather a co-operation based on mutual respect. If a problem arose they could discuss ideas to solve the problem. Mrs. Houle exclaims, "Whoever had the smarter idea would be the one who we would follow!"

We thank Mr. and Mrs. Houle for sharing some of their experiences and look forward to speaking with them again in the future. We wish them the all of the best in their future endeavours.

Mr. Bob Kreutzer

Bob Kreutzer and Sam Sinclair

Slave Lake, Alberta

November 1998

Bob Kreutzer

Interview of Bob Kreutzer
in Slave Lake, Alberta
Interviewed by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 1996

Sam: "The man we are about to interview is one of the original Slave Lakers. He's been here for a lot of years and the man is eighty years old but looks like sixty-five and acts like fifty. So you can take it from there he's in good shape. I'll let him explain where he was born and how he got to Lesser Slave Lake area and as far as we're concerned he's a legend here. Certainly glad to be part of his interview. Well Bob Kreutzer is his name, better known as Robert Kreutzer but we always known him as Bob so we still call him that. Go ahead Bob."

Bob: "I was born in Jefferson County, Idaho, in 1916, April first. When I was six years old we come from Idaho. It was Conklin on the waterways line. We stopped at Conklin because it seemed like a good place to make a living. I was only six years old. Dad, he had a store there and it lasted for maybe thirty years and we moved from there to Lac La Biche. Stayed in Lake La Biche for about six months. It didn't look like it was too good to raise a family. There was not too much there. There we moved to Smokey. Stayed there a couple years, two or three years. I just forget how many. Then we moved from there to Slave Lake. Nineteen twenty-seven it was and we've been at Slave Lake ever since. Made a good living, everything was pretty good in Slave Lake."

Sam: "In my travels I run into the odd Kreutzer in the north. When you talk about Conklin, I think there's relations to the Kreutzers there and around Waterways which is now a part of Fort McMurray. I had talked with a young Kreutzer there, not so young around forty something. That was old Frank Kreutzer's (Bob's dad's) nephew. This young fella could talk good Cree. His mother was Cree. What was your uncle's name there, the old fella? He's not alive now."

Bob: "Joe, Joe Kreutzer."

Sam: "That's probably the one. He has sons?"

Bob: "He had a family of two girls and a boy."

Sam: "This young fella, I thought he said to me he had brothers. Was there more than Joe Kreutzer, was there another one there?"

Bob: "There was a Fred Kreutzer. I don't know all of his family (in Fort McMurray) but he had three or four kids. He also married a Cree woman, part Cree."

Sam: "Ya, this woman I heard was a Métis. So you started in Slave Lake around 1927. I was one years old then. Give them a bit of history on your early years. I remember some of that too. You people practically lived off the land."

Bob: "We were trapping."

Sam: "You were well known for all the dog teams you owned."

Bob: "We owned three dog teams at one time. We commercial fished and we trapped. That was about the only thing you could do. I think it was quite a few years after that I worked on the track for ten years."

Sam: "You know you had a new bicycle then. One of these CCMs I think it was. In those days a new bicycle was like a new car. Money wasn't plentiful. Cars were high for those days. It's nothing now—just a car payment."

Bob: "If you get a new one now nobody looks at it. They'd sooner look at an old one."

Sam: "You trapped in your young days and you people took your school in Slave Lake as well. Do you remember any of the school teachers' names?"

Bob: "One was Mrs. Watkins. She wasn't Mrs. Watkins at the time but I can't remember her name."

Sam: "Bert's wife."

Bob: "She was the meanest woman on the face of the earth. Then we had another teacher, Alberta Seguin was her name. She was a very nice person. Mrs. Charlie Schurter for a while when the other ones would get sick she'd come in and teach. She was all right too."

Sam: "You know Mrs. Schurter. I didn't have her as a steady school teacher because it was a one room school. Usually we'd have two teachers at the most but mostly one. We had her for a while and when they had school here in Slave Lake she got to be a spare teacher here. She taught three of my daughters periodically (Jeannette, Linda and Lorraine). So she was around a long time, that lady. Fifty years."

Bob: "She was a very good teacher. Mrs. Watkins all she believed in was "whooping". My poor brother Mike got it steady. I don't know what he done but bang, bang, bang."

Sam: "Is there any other thing in your young days that was significant then, and kinda history now, that you can remember? Like they used to have forest fires too."

Bob: "Like in Canyon Creek I put in seventy-eight days on one fire. It was a bad one."

Sam: "I remember, I'd say 1938 or '37."

Bob: "We were all listening to a very dim radio when old Joe Louis was fighting and his last boxing match then. That was quite a few years ago."

Sam: "Ya, we heard a couple of them too when he boxed Schwelling. When he boxed Jimmy Baddick. We listened to ours, we had to work two hours for old Schurter before he let us listen to the radio."

Bob: "He asked me one time to come over because there was a skunk in his yard. To kill it and get it out of there. We said we'd do the job. We took sling shots and finally one of us got him in the head. He was laying on his back and his tail was going this way and also the spray. Every time it rained that year Charlie smelled that skunk and he didn't like us for that but what are you going to do? We never had no twenty-two to shoot him."

Sam: "Who was the other business man at the Old Town besides Schurter and Boisvert?"

Bob: "Mrs. L'Hirondelle."

Sam: "August, originally and her husband. Then it got to be Nash too."

Bob: "Ya, old Nash stepped in there. He was some kind of a salesman."

Sam: "He was the one who almost ruined my dad. Shot right by his ear. That's why he was deaf. Broke his ear drum. He had told him, "You follow me and if we see a moose I'll step aside and you shoot!". He stepped aside and old Nash was right

behind him and shot right by his ear. Funny he didn't blow his head off. He just missed him by inches. He said it even burnt him. You know from the muzzle, it was that close. It's sad when those things happen. It wasn't intentionally but it was just stupidity."

Bob: "Old Rosco just about ruined my right ear but it come back. It's still a quarter deaf. A shot from a twelve gauge that close, shooting geese at the end of the lake. It rang for I'd say two years and even now a little bit. Twelve gauge, two barrels. We got geese but I was deaf on this side for about a year. Rosco said, "I never knew your ear was so close". It was all in line and when he shot that twelve gauge makes a terrible noise."

Sam: "I don't like a bunch of people shooting with guns. If everything is safe it's all right."

Bob: "The geese was a coming and we all got down and Rosco was right there as close as he is. Pulled the gun up there and wham. Zing, your ear it went. Not too bad but still a little deaf on that side."

Sam: "Do you remember the freighting days of Old Town? Those guys used to haul freight to Wabasca."

Bob: "Out in front of Jimmy Norris's there. I think it was old Gagne that lost a team of horses through the ice."

Sam: "Well he hauled for years."

Bob: "He had a pair of black hackneys."

Sam: "High steppers."

Bob: "They could go to Wabasca in nothing flat."

Sam: "They couldn't walk those horses, trotters. Geez they were nice, pitch black."

Bob: "I had never seen a pair of horses like that in my life. There was no such a thing as walk. A fast trot."

Sam: "They were like a brand new car now, shiny. Geez, they took care of them."

Bob: "Old Joe, he used to take the nuns and the priest to Wabasca. A special trip. He made it in good time. He had a cutter and everything."

Sam: "Ya, I remember those days now. It's a good thing you brought it up. Hauling those people, it was just like hauling a minister or something."

Bob: "Ya, he would take mounties and everything to Wabasca. Fast trip. He said he used to like to keep warm between nuns when they sat along side him."

Sam: "I can still hear that guy's voice even in town here. When he'd get drunk. That squeaky voice and he was hollering at the Old Town. Where he wanted Ed Moore to 'Bring ze boat!' and he said, 'I'm not a Jesus to walk on water.'

Bob: "Wilma rode out and he 'glommed' on to the boat. He almost tipped it over and Wilma brought him to shore. 'It was good Wilma', he said. 'I would have drowned. Too much water to drink.'"

Sam: "Then he'd get into the odd fight too."

Bob: "Ya, he had a fight with old Mike Wartz. Old Mike was fishing pickerel by the bridge. He was catching good. He had four or five fish and old Gagne came out of the bar and he didn't like Mike Wartz. So he wanted to fight him I guess. Old Mike only hit him once. When he hit the bridge, he was loaded with beer right to his ears. Old Mike kind of slipped as he hit and he fell on his belly and old Wartz fell

on him and Mike shit himself. Mrs. Gagne came running out of the house and she run over and picked her man up and took him home and cleaned him up. She was a good woman."

Sam: "She was a L'Hirondelle. That was August L'Hirondelle's sister. Alphonse Lawrence was her nephew."

Bob: "Where did this other blood come in, the Mohawk? Ferman L'Hirondelle said he was part Mohawk."

Sam: "Well that could be because a lot of the L'Hirondelles and Wanyandies come from Montreal years ago. Some were Iroquois some were Mohawks. Mohawks were known for the steel workers."

Bob: "I told Edmo, I said "Edmo, Furman told me, (you're a cousin to him) you have a lot of Mohawk blood in you." He got mad. He said "I got Cree blood but no Mohawk." I said it's there."

Sam: "He hated to be called Indian, you know."

Bob: "Sometimes, we didn't have hardly any clothes."

Sam: "Did you ever remember wearing anything related to moose, deer?"

Bob: "Moccasins and stuff. Oh ya, lots. We even tanned our own moose hides. Made our own toboggans and stuff. As far as having good winter clothes, no dice. Lots of the time it was homemade stuff, sure it was warm but not like now. The clothes that we had on then ('hungry '30' clothes) were not good. We put rabbit skins inside the moccasins and moccasin rubbers and then another pair with moss in it to keep your feet warm. It was not one of those years where it was nice."

Sam: "What was your food?"

Bob: "We lived on deer and moose and we had a garden and stuff, trapping, chickens, ducks."

Sam: "Did you people eat any rabbits?"

Bob: "Yes we have."

Sam: "Partridges too and ducks?"

Bob: "A lot of fish. That's one thing we never did in the hungry '30s was starve. We always had food and we shared with people that were kind of down, that couldn't help themselves."

Sam: "Also fur was a pretty fair price."

Bob: "Until 1925. Then it dropped. That's what caused Dad to break up in Conklin. He kept all the trappers that was dealing with him until trapping season and then they'd pay their debts. A silver fox was worth twenty-five hundred dollars. All fur was a very good price. The next year it slumped to ten/fifteen dollars for a silver fox. Well most of them were Cree and Chipewyan people. They couldn't pay their debts and the old man said, 'I don't blame you.' The way things went he said, 'it's not your fault that you can't pay. There's no money for things now.' So he took a washtub full of those books. It took a good hour to burn all of those counter books up. He just took them out. The people there were all the good people. The Chipewyan and the Cree and then there were other people. They were good, very, very decent people. They said, 'Frank, we'd like you to stay.' 'Well I'm going to move on. I've got rabbits in my boots. I'm going to move out of here,' he said. It's the slump, eh. They had a party and the whole bunch come. There was about fifty

or a hundred people come. The old man poured gas on the counter bills and burnt them and we left. From there we went to Smokey. It wasn't too good there either. No matter where you went. When we come to Slave Lake he said, 'You better carry on through.' The old man says, 'Here's where I get off. We got a big lake and it looks like a place where I can make a living.'" They said, 'You're crazy to get off here. They said, 'The Native people here probably won't like you.' The old man said, 'I get along good with the Native people.' They said, 'They're apt to take your hair and put it on their belt,' trying to scare the old man. The old man said, 'I'm not scared. Them are the best people there is. It's the Whites that make the other people deteriorate. They're no good.' We stayed about a year in Slave Lake. All the Native people got along with us good. It was all right."

Sam: "Where did you live, in the Old Town that time?"

Bob: "We lived on the north shore. You know by that first campsite. Just about fifty yards."

Sam: "I remember where you lived now. You used to have a bunch of dogs tied in the trees."

Bob: "We had about twelve or fifteen dogs at one time. We sold dogs to trappers that needed them. We had four that were so close to a wolf that if they went under a brush pile you shouldn't try to get them out because they'd bite you or try to eat you up. The old man told Mrs. Nash (Mrs. L'Hirondelle at the time) he said, 'I've got four wolves I want to sell you.' The old man shot those four dogs and sold them to her as wolves. Eighty dollars a piece. She said, 'They're nice and heavy'. The old Jew, Sam Houle in Edmonton said 'Kreutzer, he sold you three quarter dogs for wolves.' Mrs. L'Hirondelle said 'Oh no, he didn't.' He said 'The hide on a wolf is thin. The hide on a dog is thick. I'm sure that these are not pure wolves.' Mrs. L'Hirondelle got more than we got for them. We got about eighty dollars a piece for them and she wouldn't say what she got. I know she got a good price. They were awful big dogs but about half wolf. Too much wolf to use as a dog to try and get them to do something because they'd bite you. He'd lay there and his eyes would shine up and all of the sudden he'd growl and you couldn't touch him. They will bite."

Sam: "So you're main language has always been English? You're first language?"

Bob: "Ya."

Sam: "Never any Cree or French?"

Bob: "Well I'll tell you Sam, the Cree part of it I could do about halfway through it. I could talk a lot of Cree. All the bad stuff. I figure I knew that."

Sam: "Health care. You went through the toughness of when there was no doctor or nurse in the area. That was tough then too."

Bob: "In 1942, Maggie was pregnant with Elmer. I put her in High Prairie and I was working on the section. Maggie got fed up with being there by herself and she wanted to get home. I was living in Mitsue. The arse-hole end of the world. There was no road in there or no nothing. Eddy Woods had a car, a model A. She come home on the fifth of December. I'll never forget it. She had pains as soon as she landed home. I was looking after Swanson Lumber Company, just a watchmen. It was the only phone that was there. It was awfully cold, about twenty five below

zero. I got on the phone and I phoned Smith. My ear after that was froze. There was water in them. I got through there and there was a nurse there, nurse Manes. She said, 'What's the matter with that man having his wife in Mitsue, to have a kid where there's nobody? I know the place and it's isolated.' So I said to Eddy Woods, 'She'll come if she has a way to get there but it's got to be right away.' So we built a fire over this model A to warm it up so we could start it. It took about an hour. An hour is the longest thing in that kind of a situation. So we finally got all the frost out of it I cranked it and it almost broke my arm. It kicked and done everything and it hit me right here and put a blue mark. We finally got it going and Eddy said, 'I'll go to pick her up.' Come back and all we could see is part of the head of the little guy. She was in terrible labour pain. When nurse Manes got there she knew how to handle this situation. Build her up instead of tear her down. Finally, the kid was born and everything was fine—in Mitsue. Finally, the kid was born and everything turned out good. She said, 'I'm not too bad.' She didn't bleed too heavy. Small little woman, eh. Manes says 'Kreutzer, if it's the last thing I do on earth I'm putting you in jail. I mean it. We're having a court case over this. You got no mercy for a woman.' I told her 'Hang on for a minute let me do some talking.' She says, I am doing the talking. As soon as I can arrange it charges will be laid for cruelty.' She had all kinds of other different things in there that I didn't understand. She was using high language on me and all I was waiting for was for her to quit, to keep her mouth shut so I could talk. So Maggie hollered, she was awfully weak, 'tell her what you done.' Finally she shut her mouth. Oh, she was red hot. I never seen a woman that mad in my life because Maggie was her friend. She'd always help her in the legion. Taking tonsils out of the kids. She said, 'I like this little woman and I don't know who the hell you think you are but I'll change your attitude.' Well I said, 'Now it's my turn.' She said, 'Go ahead, it won't do you no good.' I said, 'I took Maggie to High Prairie and I put her in the place and I paid for it lock, stock and barrel where she wanted to be until the kid was born and she'd come with the kid, not with it, within her. Instead of getting so mean, so rough.' She said, 'I seen so much of this that's what makes me. . . . I figure you're another one of those types. I said, 'You should have let me talk first.' 'Well, under the circumstances I'll say I'm sorry. I shouldn't have flew off the handle. I see so many of these cases like this one and I figured you were just another one of those guys.' I said, 'I tried to stop you but you were so mean. So that was that."

Sam: "Well that was quite an experience."

Bob: "Boy, did I suffer there. If we could have got nobody we could have got Mother and a couple other ones. You know they don't know what a nurse knows."

Sam: "Who was one of the midwives around then?"

Bob: "Mrs. Boisvert."

Sam: "So you people never really got involved with herbs and healing of Indian Medicines?"

Bob: "There was a rat root that we eat quite a bit. We never knew how to get it but we had a lot of Native friends. It's a root and they slice it. They boil it in a kind of a sugar. It's nice to take but boy it's hot. It was better than any of the medicine they got now."

Sam: " I still take a little bit of it for my heart. When it's chopped up fine, almost like a powder. I take it with a spoon with water. Lukewarm water."

Bob: "You know, I'd like to say this. I think that rat root properly processed is the best thing for a cold that exists. I think it's perfect."

Sam: "Oh ya, if you catch a cold early on and you take that you'll stop it."

Bob: "It does. It does. It saved me lots of times. There was an old lady we used to go to but I can't think of her name. She used to have lots of it. She used to give us all we wanted. She said, 'Help me sometime making it'. I seen this stuff. I don't know how they get it yet. I went rat trapping and I'd pull up all kinds of different roots and stuff from around the edge. It wasn't that stuff. As far as I'm concerned it's the best remedy for a cold."

Sam: "Did you hear any stories on the epidemic of 1918? You people come later."

Bob: "There was an aciphidity(?) that dad used on us. I don't know if it exists any more this aciphidity. You put it around your neck and it's got a smell. It chases away the germs to a certain extent. It seemed to work."

Sam: "He was in Idaho then."

Bob: "In '22, when we come here we heard about that plague that hit Alberta too. It was a terrible thing. In the States in Idaho where we come from they died like something terrible. There was no such a thing as save anybody and it was mostly fat people that were affected."

Sam: "You people hunted, trapped, you worked on the railroad, you fought some fires."

Bob: "I worked on the railroad for ten years."

Sam: "You people used to do quite a bit of fishing too."

Bob: "Ya, we commercial fished. In 1937, I started on the track. You started two bits an hour. You worked seventy eight days for thirty five cents an hour. Another seventy eight days for forty one cents an hour. Another seventy eight working days for forty three cents, the top wages. Then I got relieving jobs, section foreman type work and that wasn't much either: sixty-seven cents an hour. At forty-three cents you'd get about maybe twenty dollars every two weeks. They said it went a long ways; it didn't. I remember those red-strap overalls. There were more patches on them than pants. The shoes, we used to get an old tire to make the sole. The clawbar to pull the spikes, we'd stick that on there and it was good for another six months."

Sam: "I remember those shoes now, years ago. I used to see them."

Bob: "I still got the shovel that I wore out. It was half wore out. An NAR. it's not NAR no more but that shovel is kind of a keepsake of mine. You'd wear a shovel out in a month or two down to where it was no good for nothing."

Sam: "From tamping?"

Bob: "Ya."

Sam: "That was hard work. I done that when I was fifteen."

Bob: "You're brother Walter was one of the best spikers I've ever seen. Boy he was good. He was a precision man with a spike maul."

Sam: "That's the way he was with timber too. He would move slowly but when he was through falling those things were just like uniform. Just like they'd been laid there by a machine."

Bob: "He's the only man I seen. He put the spike on the maul and swing it around and hit that square in the plate. He was a first class man on the railroad. He worked a long time on the railroad. A good man."

Sam: "He was a spare foreman too near the end. When his marriage went to hell everything fell apart. That's about when his pitching days were good too."

Bob: "He was a good pitcher too. Old left hand, eh. I watched him play a lot of games. He was good. Walter was a pretty good fella too. Then his marriage went to hell and it takes a toll on anybody. I wouldn't want it to happen to me."

Sam: "The part that was tough there is we lived beside it for a while. My mother had to raise that second family. It shortened her life a lot. Ten kids. These young fellas can still remember it and they thank us. For my mother bringing them up so well and fed well. Like Button, the older one, Walter is his name. Leonard and all these young fellas."

Bob: "They were a good family. The Sinclair family, as far as I'm concerned, perfect. When we worked for Swanson Pine, Joe. That man was a heavy eater. He could hardly pack his lunch from the Old Town. Him and I got along so good. He had his lunch over his shoulder. He said, 'Lift this one.' I said, 'What do you got in there?' 'Just my lunch. Wait'll I eat supper!' he said. I used to laugh at him. One time, well you were the foreman. We knew you were a pretty good guy. This time you got kind of cranky. We were both chewing tobacco. It looked like a mass of seagulls were in there. You come in there you said, 'You're the dangest bunch of buggers I ever seen in my entire life. What are you trying to do this for?'"

Sam: "I used to have to check the lumber that they loaded in the boxcar. Everything had to be checked off and be accurate. They had this stuff all over the lumber."

Bob: "He had to go and get himself a piece of cardboard so he could kneel down and check it out. He was cross eyed there for about I'd say fifteen or twenty minutes. It looked like a mass of seagulls have been in here. Do you remember the time we picked Bobby Barnes up? He was kneeled over and he was just about froze and his teeth were laying on the sawdust. We stuck a two by four in and packed him in the place where we lunched. As he was thawing out he was starting to stretch and everything and he said, "Where in the hell was I?" He was drunker than a skunk."

Sam: "He was good to have on a crew though. He'd keep you laughing. You didn't follow a spirituality but you understood it to a certain degree, a lot of the old Indian religious beliefs. I always respected that. I didn't fully understand it, but I always respect it to this day. And it's slowly coming back."

Bob: "It is the right thing. Absolutely."

Sam: "There's no false to that. It's right from the heart. When you want to help others, to help people, make them happy, feed them if you can. Alcohol splits people but it's there. If you do all these good things to people it's good for your soul too."

Bob: "If I didn't treat my wife one hundred percent I wouldn't be sitting and talking to you right now. That's a fact. It was sixty/forty and I gave her the sixty."

Sam: "Oh ya, you'll never be sorry for that."

Bob: "That's the only way I can exist now. I never laid a hand on her. Well, 'shut your mouth you're talking too much' and that was about as far as we got, me and my

wife. She was a good little person. I'm glad that she was part Native. For the simple reason, I thought that made a good person out of her."

Sam: "Ya, there's no sorriness there she had a good heart. Her mother was like that too."

Bob: "I knew her mother. When I was broke uptown I was walking around broke and she could tell. She come uptown and she come over to me and said "I know exactly what's wrong with you." I said "what do you think?" She said "You're broke." and she gave me five dollars. That was a lot of money those days. I didn't want to take it and she said "Go ahead." I remember one time in the Old Town the old man was in the bar, old McGillis. He used to like to drink a little bit. He come outside and he stepped on a skunk and it peed all over him. He went home. There were skunks all over the place because of the flood. She wouldn't let him in the house. She opened the door and then she shut the door. She said you sleep in the barn. I'll never forget that."

Sam: "The control of a family. Did you share responsibility with your wife? Or did you see your family as you grow up, your parents, working together too on some of the decision making? Which one do you think was effective, that could be used as a model?"

Bob: "To be married and have a family, you mean?"

Sam: "No, so much as being boss at home. Sometime you have one head of the household that calls all the shots. Sometimes they overdo it. Then you have a family that shares the responsibility of the decision making."

Bob: "My own and my wife's you mean?"

Sam: "Ya."

Bob: "I and Maggie, we always share no matter what it was. We'd talk it over and I wouldn't say, 'You don't know much, get out of here.' and she wouldn't say that to me. We shared that, sure. It worked, perfect. That's the only way a marriage can work in my estimation. That's the only way it'll work. I remember one time Sam, I'm going to bring this into it, I remember one time when I was working for Swanson or (Ed at the time). We couldn't get by the bar. 'Just one Bob. One beer and then we'll go home, supper tastes better.' It was always ten o' clock when it closed at that time. That's when we'd go home. Maggie said, 'Look at your food, it's dry and it's cold. We're not having very much togetherness here.' I said, 'I'm going to tell you something right now, I quit. Right as of now I'll be home for supper at the right time.' They coaxed me after that, and they coaxed, they coaxed and they coaxed. 'Come on just for one beer. Oh your wife's got you by the nose.' I said, 'Nobody's got me by the nose but I know from here on out I'm going home. I'm having supper. I'm going to start doing things the right way. The way it's supposed to be. The proper way.' Maggie wouldn't believe it but after about four years she found out it was a fact. I like it that way. If I'd a went against her everything would have been upside down. It wouldn't have been right."

Sam: "You mentioned about the trading posts. Your dad was involved in fur buying and what have you. It says participation in world wars. Was your father in the war?"

Bob: "No."

Sam: "He was in the states, eh?"

Bob: "He was born in Austria. He come from Austria to the states when he was three years old."

Sam: "Development of old town. This is a survey of this area. Development of Old Town and the new town. Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian relationships, what their asking here. How did the Indians, in your view, and the Europeans get along? Remember there was a slew of Germans here."

Bob: "There was August Hangartner and Bruno Fedeman."

Sam: "That little frail guy too. That carpenter, what the heck was his name? He lived over here in Slave Lake a long time. I think, until he died. The old fella, he used to be part of Thiessen group."

Bob: "You know, I can't think of his name and I worked for the guy."

Sam: "You remember the guy. Frail guy, real good carpenter. They had their toe-hold in that whole northern area."

Bob: "Those people got along very good with the Native people. They survived with them. Got along very good with them. Like everything else there were some that didn't. I'd say seventy-five percent of them got along pretty fair with Native people."

Sam: "Who did you mention there, Fedeman did you say?"

Bob: "Bruno Fedeman."

Sam: "Fedeman, where did he go?"

Bob: "I don't know. Then there was Bulshite and Strayla."

Sam: "The old man Julius. You know it's quite a, Julius Strayla we called him."

Bob: "He was from Germany. He was a shoemaker."

Sam: "You know we have to tell this story when old Braniff was living here. This used to be his land. This was our land first, Sinclair land. They were going for some tamarack wood up here. Bobby was along. He was working for Braniff and old Strayla was kind of a farmhand too. So he said, 'We're going over here not too far in.' and a big moose walked across. Old Harry used to take a rifle along."

Bob: "A forty-five seventy lever action. I used to shoot moose with it. On the front site he had a copper rivet in there. It was an accident, you hit anything it."

Sam: "Anyway, Strayla was sitting in the back. Bobby said he was sitting in the center. Braniff was driving the team. He said this moose ambled right across in the front of them. Stopped there and old Braniff said, 'Come on Bobby, shoot that moose!' Bobby said, 'I can't see good enough to shoot.' So Harry said, 'What about you Strayla? You should be a good shot.' 'Oh, ya give me the gun. I used to be the best shot in my regiment.' He used to be in the German army. He shot twice and the moose walked into the bush. Old Braniff looked at Strayla and said, 'No wonder the Germans lost the war!' That was a real story worth telling."

Bob: "Do you remember old Kraut? You might have heard something about old Kraut. He lived down by that bridge that goes over the creek. He lived in a little shack there."

Sam: "Old Town?"

Bob: "No here. Out from Braniffs', where Braniff lives."

Sam: "Oh ya, I remember that part. That must be close to where Fred Johnston lived."

Bob: "He had one tooth in there and it was that square. On the one side and it was aching. It was hollow. Old Saunders says, 'I can pull your tooth. It will be absolutely, you will not feel no pain.' So he said, 'What kind of medicine have you got?' There was a band stump there about this big. Just the right height. 'I'll give you the antiseptic!' He wound up and give him a right on the jaw. He knocked him colder than hell. He had a pair of forceps. He reached in there and pulled the tooth. I can remember that tooth was about that square right down the side. He took a whole pail of water out of the creek and poured it on him. I've never seen a thing like it in my life. He made sure he knocked him cold. He says 'How do you feel? How do you feel there Kraut?' He says, 'I feel like I'm going to die!' He said 'Did you feel that tooth come out?' He said, 'I never felt a thing.' You know I would have liked a video camera to take a picture of that. Old Braniff said to him, 'You'll never pull a tooth around me.' He replied, 'You haven't got any to pull.'"

Sam: "This old Saunders, my grandkids got a kick out of the story, that time when he had false teeth too. One day he was in one of the cafe's here and he bought a chocolate bar. He used to buy those soft ones like malted milk. He got chewing on this malted milk but one of his false teeth got into the chocolate bar. Every time he chewed he'd hit this hard spot. I guess he was telling this guy there, 'By gum, there's nuts in this one.' Then when he got to the bar here his tooth was in it."

Bob: "Lloyd McDonald, there was a terrible man when he got a little drink. He'd go into the pool hall and Saunders was running it. He grabbed him and lifted him right over the counter and sat him down. That Lloyd had a grip like a horse. He was a very strong man."

Sam: "I used to hate when he'd grab you in the leg. I actually whacked him one time. I hit him right in the guts. He said, 'What did you do that for?' I said, 'My leg is not a rubber stamp to squeeze.' I had a mark on my leg for months."

Bob: "He put a blue mark on my arm. I hit him with a left and he let go. I said, 'Don't do that no more.'"

Sam: "He had an iron grip."

Bob: "You know those eight ounce beer glasses. He put a glove on and went like this, crumbled. I remember Billy Lukan was going to fight him. I told Billy, 'Don't you go out and fight Lloyd because that's a terrible mistake.' He said, 'I'm scrapping him.' Lloyd was worked his away around back and sunk his hands under the ribs and then he started tearing him apart. I never heard Billy holler so much in my life. I hollered at Lloyd. I said, 'You'll kill him.' Lloyd said, 'Never tackle a man, kid!' Lloyd had training too. He wouldn't fight nobody. Billy got a little too far and Lloyd got under his ribs. He would have tore all of his ribs out if it wasn't for me."

Sam: "We packed moose meat out of the bush one time. Walter and I and Fred Barnes and old Lloyd. Right over the mountain here at Mitsue hill, all day we walked. Walter killed this moose. He said, 'You guys take home whatever you want. Whatever you can pack is yours.' I loaded up as much as I could. I figured I had maybe about eighty-five pounds. We were on snowshoes. Lloyd took the lead. We had a speeder parked off the tracks. He was the foreman. When we got there we must have been an hour behind him. We left in the dark, when we left the speeder.

When we got home in the evening it was dark. We walked about ten or twelve hours—big pack. Old Fred Barnes wouldn't let us leave him because he could hear wolves once in a while. 'Don't leave me, don't leave me. That's when my eyes are bigger than my stomach.' because he had too big a pack. He couldn't hack 'er. He was already fat. At that time we were in shape. We got to the tracks but we stopped three or four times. We'd sit on a log and rest your pack. It took us about four hours to get out. Anyway, Lloyd said, 'Grab my pack.' and I couldn't lift that thing! I was too tired. That thing must have weighed a hundred and twenty-five pounds. He said he never stopped once. I believe him because he was a powerful man. That was like a toy to him. Those were the good old days."

Bob: "We come to Slave Lake, him and I, and we had a jug of moonshine from old Larson. We were going to go to a dance. Gunther, he went to town but Lloyd had the key to open the shed to get the speeder. We took all the tools off it. We come into Slave Lake at Mitsue Creek. That's where we met the train. You know where the bank is, down like this. That speeder. I says to Lloyd, 'We'll never get that speeder back on the track after the train passed.' Lloyd says, 'Robert, a little bit of this Larson moonshine and I'll pack 'er up just like nothing.' He was sinking right in the grade. We took the speeder off and made sure we never broke this vinegar jug that was filled with moonshine. He took a real sloppy feed off of that one. Now he said, 'Robert, just guider 'er up.' and that's all I had to do. I never seen a man like that in my life. Talk about powerful. We got around there and we had a hell of a time. We got into the bar and we seen Gunther Pearson, was that ever a strict man. 'How did you guys get here?' Lloyd said, 'I don't think it's any of your business how we got here.' We left the speeder about a half a mile out on them two little rails where you could put a speeder on in case. We left it there and covered it with a couple of branches. We got in the bar and Lloyd left. He said he was going to leave for an hour or so. We all had our specials there in Slave Lake. When he got back he said, 'Robert, it's too bad you're not having her tonight.'"

Sam: "That partly covers storytelling, education and moral values. That was a way of life too: talking, stories. You were never involved in residential schools because you weren't in the mission. Neither was Maggie. Is there anything that you can figure that we might have missed? We might be able to add a few things that I know about you. I might not say now but I might think of it. These were the good things. Well there were never any bad things about you're make up. I might put one odd humorous one in there but what we want to do is make it so it's readable. The truth and if there's something that we might want to add that I know that we done together. I know of a few things. You can't think of it all at once. You get home two hours from now and you'll think of something you should have said. That's normal. If we can, when we get these written up we should be able to show them to every person we interview. Listen either to the tape or the written one. Look at it and tell us if there's anything there that we missed, that you want to add on or is there something there that maybe we misunderstood. That's not likely to happen but it can. Just one word sometime. We just want to be fair of whatever's presented. What will happen to some of this documentation is that it'll end up in the archives later on. That'll be for the general public to take for free. It'll never be

sold for any profit. It's not meant for that. It's meant if you want a copy of that report you would get it for free or anybody would get it for free. There would be limited copies. Just so some place down the line you're grandchildren or great-grandchildren could read it. That's worth something a hundred years from now. That's what this will be used for. How people survived under the worst conditions and were healthy enough to fight it off."

Bob: "I remember one time we lived on the north shore. I cut my hand with an axe splitting wood. It was in April and it was a snow storm. First part of April. We come to the old town and it was very lucky that we found a nurse. She stitched my hand up with horse hair. We walked in. That's a long walk. My mother, tough little woman. I remember laying on my hand when the nurse was stitching me up and I was in such pain. Partly cut this chord off here. As she was putting that needle to me, I was thirteen years old and I was lifting her. Man, did I suffer. For two years my wrist drooped. I couldn't lift my wrist like this. They put a cross in there. How do you think we managed to make this heal? Balsam sap. There was a Native person come through who used to come right by our place on the old Wabasca road. He was a smart man. He said, 'You use balsam sap and it will heal.' And it did heal too."

Sam: "You know who mentioned that last night was Ben Norberg. That same sap. Do you remember when he talked about it? It had a lot of drawing power too."

Bob: "Well, it saved my hand. In those days there was no such a thing as if you had something, even a little turpentine, it was a miracle. Hot salt water, wash that sap off, put on new sap, bandage it up."

Sam: "I remember years ago people used to get a rash of boils once in awhile. I don't know what caused it. Probably something we drank, maybe in the water or food. I don't know but my dad used to go and get this bark off a tamarack. He'd peel the inside, that reddish bark. Boil that and then he'd put that on your boil and in a day that would be totally dry. It just sucked all of the bad stuff out."

Bob: "I remember when I had a boil. It was a Native woman that helped me out with that, with Mother. It might have been Sophie. I'm not sure on that but anyway when she got the stuff she had and put it on there, the boil dissipated."

Sam: "What nationality was your mother?"

Bob: "Mother was half German and Irish."

Sam: "That little Irish temper but she was a good-hearted woman."

Bob: "She was all right. She got along good with the Native people, very good. I remember her and Flora, they had a lot of talks. She lived right across from Flora. They talked there for hours."

Sam: "Well we lived in that house too. It was our house before Flora got it."

Bob: "Alongside the legion there."

Sam: "Ya. That used to be our lot, right behind the legion."

Bob: "That's where old Schurter made a mistake. I tell you when she got through with him he knew where his ears were. She didn't pull no punches."

Sam: "I guess we pretty well covered quite a few things."

Bob: "It's pretty hard to get a thing like this."

Sam: "We're going to be back in this area later on too. Naturally, in May we're going to be three or four days up by the lake. Where you used to come and see us. We'll have most of our family there and we'll have good western music. We'll have a good time and have a good feast. You're part of the family."

Bob: "I'd like to go."

Sam: "I'd like to thank you for helping us. Certainly we'll stay in touch."

Bob: "You and I always did stay in touch."

Mr. Ben Norberg

Ben Norberg (deceased July 12, 1996)

(Photo provided by Evelyn and Harold Norberg)

Interview of Ben Norberg
Slave Lake, Alberta
Interviewed by Sam Sinclair
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
March 1996

Sam: "This gentleman we're about to talk to here in this interview is a man who is ninety-one, probably going on ninety-two. He has a very clear mind and certainly I admire a man that age (who is) as well read as most of us. I will ask this gentleman where he originally came from. I've known him at least sixty years. And he will give us a little history of his background. He is certainly one of the more famous 'sawmillers' in this country. That's where I got to know him best, working around sawmills in my younger days. And I certainly learnt a lot from this man in the workforce, but never had the knowledge he had, as a workman. He could set up sawmills or any other kind of machinery that was related to the timber industry, he knew it. So Ben, when did you come into this country? You say you were born almost ninety two years ago and what country was that?"

Ben: "Norway."

Sam: "Norway eh. So if you could give us a time roughly when you came to Canada and what area did you come to first."

Ben: "Well, first I came to Manitoba but I didn't like it there so I stopped in southern Saskatchewan for a while."

Sam: "Was this in the '20s or '30s?"

Ben: "That would be in the '20s. I've been in Alberta and BC off and on. I finally settled down here."

Sam: "In the Lesser Slave Lake area?"

Ben: "Yes. I first met the Cree in Driftpile."

Sam: "That was in the '30s?"

Ben: "Yes. Then I moved to Slave Lake but I'm living in Faust now."

Sam: "But it's all in the Slave Lake area."

Ben: "Yes. I've worked all over. I was harvesting and was a railroad construction worker."

Sam: "Did you ever do any fishing in the Lesser Slave Lake area?"

Ben: "No. I could never see anything in the fishing here."

Sam: "You built boats though."

Ben: "Yes, I built boats."

Sam: "Did you build any boats for fisherman?"

Ben: "Yes. I built twenty-five boats for fisherman but I can't afford to build one for myself."

Sam: "All the time you worked in this area were you ever involved with the Aboriginal people?"

Ben: "Well that was most of the people there were to associate with. So I made a lot of good friends there."

Sam: "Some of the things they ask here (the clothing in the olden days) but I don't think it would pertain to you so much, you know when they used to wear moosehide jackets."

Ben: "Well, when I was here there wasn't much of that. Mostly Natives would wear the same kind of clothes that we did. Of course some of them wore buckskin coats."

Sam: "Did you ever get involved with trapping?"

Ben: "No. I trapped one time and almost froze to death. Another fellow and I we went out rat trapping. Well I was in Sangudo at that time. I was on the Framond River and we came down the Framond River into the Athabasca. We had about four hundred rats between us. We had a hell of a cold because we didn't have any dry clothes. We were out there for about three weeks."

Sam: "In those days what were people living in mostly?"

Ben: "Mostly log houses. The Natives they usually lived in tents in the summertime."

Sam: ". . . .and the odd teepee eh?"

Ben: "Yeah, teepees, well that's a tent, isn't it?"

Sam: "Well really they are two different things, but it's still a canvas."

Ben: "Some had teepees, but most had ordinary tents."

Sam: "In those days was travel done mostly by foot?"

Ben: "You didn't used to walk very far as long as there was freight trains. They didn't cost any money."

Sam: "Yeah, free rides were better known as 'hoboing'."

Ben: "The only thing about that was that you had to be good at running because there were railroad police there."

Sam: "Were you involved with horses?"

Ben: "No."

Sam: "Did you ever own vehicles in your earlier days?"

Ben: "Oh yes, I had an old Model T. That was the best car ever made!"

Sam: "What year did you have your Model T?"

Ben: "I think the car was a '28. That was in the early '30s."

Sam: "What was your first language?"

Ben: "Norwegian."

Sam: "Your second language was then English?"

Ben: "Yes, English."

Sam: "You never really learned any Cree?"

Ben: "No."

Sam: "Were you ever involved with Native traditional healing?"

Ben: "No."

Sam: "Where were you during the 1918 flu?"

Ben: "I was at Norway then."

Sam: "You know the more I talk to people and also learning from my dad who helped bury a lot of our relations, that was definitely poison gas from the First World War. Even in Wabasca they could see it coming in like a cloud. It settled in different areas. And in each one of those areas, there happened to be a reserve there, and (it) missed part of Wabasca. Yet it hit Desmarais and that reserve across the way. And the one old timer that was talking about that said you could see it in

the air, like it was drifting. They said it was the flu. That was poison gas. It killed people in the States and in Russia. They lost five million people. It killed too many innocent people, so that's why they didn't use it in the Second World War. They don't want to admit it, but they might as well be told what people are saying. My dad said people were well in the evening, by morning they were dead."

Ben: "I remember that, I was in the old country then. They had it there too. It was bad."

Sam: "What about education? You went to school in Norway?"

Ben: "Yes."

Sam: "Did you know enough English when you came to Canada?"

Ben: "Yes."

Sam: "Have you ever been to a residential school?"

Ben: "No."

Sam: "Did you actually see Indian medicine being used as medication?"

Ben: "Yes."

Sam: "Do you believe it was effective?"

Ben: "I think it was but I never had an occasion to try it. There was only one thing that I used of Indian medicine and that was balsam pitch. That's a darn good cold medicine. I would put that in my tea. The Natives' tea tasted awful but it was good (for you)."

Sam: "Did you ever do any fire-fighting?"

Ben: "Yes. I fought fires in Swan Hills that time they had that mill up there. I was called to fight one here in Kinuso, but when I got there, the fire was out."

Sam: "How did you find your homelife in the leadership quality? Did you call all the shots or did you share it with your wife? My mother was more or less the boss at home, years ago, but they shared a lot of that leadership later. My dad used to call the shots with the stock and making hay but she definitely called the shots within the family. Did you have to go through anything like that?"

Ben: "No."

Sam: "Did you agree with each other?"

Ben: "Yeah, no problems."

Sam: "That is a pretty good indication, so far, of the people we dealt with of the sharing of responsibility and nobody specifically being boss works the best (they say)."

Ben: "Well, the wife looked after the house and most of the finances."

Sam: "And you done the outside work and called the shots there eh?"

Ben: "Yeah."

Sam: "Do you remember when you came over here, they started having those Treaty days, you know once a year?"

Ben: "Yeah."

Sam: "Because that used to be quite an event. That big five dollars they used to get."

Ben: "It was interesting. You had them fur traders coming around selling things. They used to follow around the Treaty. They had all kinds of junk to sell to the Indians."

Sam: "Did they ever give you any money?"

Ben: "No."

Evelyn: (Interviewee's daughter-in-law) "Before you retire don't forget to tell them you built Indian homes for fifteen years, remember?"

Ben: "Yeah."

Sam: "What we could do now Ben, if it's all right with you, just give us an idea on what you got involved in. Just say it in your own way anything in life that you thought was something of a highlight."

Ben: "I can't say a whole heck of a lot. People were better off those days because they didn't have the demands they have today."

Sam: "There was no such things as welfare in those days."

Ben: "No welfare. Welfare was out in the bush. You had to knock down a moose or something. That was the welfare. Of course there was always a lot of fish to snag."

Sam: "Did you notice that there was more sharing those days?"

Ben: "Oh yes. I notice that time and time again. Sometimes you go out there on a raft and get two or three moose, and boy, everybody was eating."

Sam: "Did you see other things too like when people were sick, sometime some families would get sick, did you see other people helping them? Because doctors weren't plentiful eh."

Ben: "No, we only had one doctor here and that was doctor McIntyre in High Prairie."

Sam: "Where did this Dr. Belanger, they talk about, did you ever run into him?"

Ben: "Yes, Dr. Belanger well he was from Falher. He was operating in Grouard quite a bit. I knew him."

Sam: "This McIntyre, wasn't there a McIntyre who used to run a store for McRae? Was that his name?"

Ben: "McIntosh."

Sam: "McIntosh! Oh yeah, I'm mixed up there a bit. Where did he come from?"

Ben: "McIntosh was originally from Ontario and I guess he was in Saskatchewan for a long time. In fact I think that's where he got married. Then he came out to Faust."

Evelyn: "All these towns, you know all the guys that were named after these towns, like Smith."

Ben: "Smith, that was, his name was Rasburn Smith but they used to call him Raspberry Smith."

Sam: "Oh, was he red-headed or what?"

Ben: "I can't actually tell you but I've seen him."

Sam: "When you first come into this area, see one town over here as you know, is named after an Indian name: Kinuso is *Kinusew*. When you first come over, what was it then?"

Ben: "*Kinusew*."

Sam: "See the first Chief in the Slave Lake area was *Kinusew*. See one time there was only one Chief for all these reserves around here and he was the original. Then they started using what they call Headmen. They didn't have Chiefs in the area except him. Then they had these Headmen that were picked from each reserve and when the Indian agent started to be in charge he started recommending chiefs in each little reserve. The first Chief here in Slave Lake was Francois Twinn."

Ben: "In Driftpile it was Giroux's wasn't it?"

Sam: "I imagine. I don't know exactly. Gordie has a list of all of them."

Ben: "I remember there was an old Chief that lived up there. He was an old man with long white whiskers and he wore a black hat."

Sam: "You know, it's amazing. Like there was one old man we interviewed in Sandy Lake. He's ninety-six years old, still walks around, his moccasins are that wide, you know the same kind they used to use for snowshoes and he gets around good. Still traps a bit and his brother was the first Chief in the Bigstone band. His name is Alphonse Beaver. While we were sitting there, he rolled a couple of cigarettes and then later on he filled his pipe with tobacco. Then my grandson said, 'There can't be too much wrong with smoking. The guy is ninety-six and he still gets around.'"

Ben: "The Natives used to smoke a lot of that kinnikinnick. That's red willow bark. I remember we used to smoke it. We mixed it with tobacco and it was a hell of a good smoke. Tobacco cost a lot of money those days. You could buy a package of tobacco for thirty-five cents and it wouldn't last you very long so you went and got some kinnikinnick and mixed it. It was good. We used to get those red willows and peel the outside bark off. Then the inside bark, they scraped that up, dried it and mixed it with tobacco."

Sam: "Somebody talked about, they used to also take some of these bulrushes and smoke them somehow. They did it in Wabasca apparently. When you arrived in this general area, was there any steamboats in use then?"

Ben: "No, they were finished. There was an old one laying on the beach in Faust there years ago, but that rotted."

Sam: "Tell us a little bit about, you were involved in house building here, probably in one of the northern reserves. What kind of involvement did you have then? Were you working for the reserve, for the Indian agency or what?"

Ben: "The Indian agency. Usually the Natives would put up the logs and put in all the woodwork. They put the floors in."

Sam: "What kind of wages were they paying those days?"

Ben: "Well about two dollars an hour for a carpenter."

Sam: "That was high compared to the other people though eh?"

Ben: "Heck yeah."

Sam: "Could you remember roughly what year that was?"

Ben: "It was in the late '30s."

Sam: "Do you remember this flood they had here in 1935 in Old Town?"

Ben: "Oh yeah, I remember that really good. They had it in Driftpile, Kinuso, all over. The whole country was flooded."

Evelyn: "He worked here, remember you said you used to see Fukal and go and get a case of beer."

Sam: "There's no policeman here so if you had a case of beer on the job that's okay too."

Ben: "The policeman, well he lived in Kinuso. Then there was another one they used down here from Grouard and he travelled horseback in those days."

Sam: "Who is he talking about, a policeman?"

Ben: "Kinuso, that was the provincial police. The RCMP, they came from Grouard."

Sam: "That was kind of the bigger town then, eh?"

Ben: "Yeah, Grouard that was the place those days. There's nothing in High Prairie. There's nothing but a hotel there."

Sam: "What kind of activity used to go on in Grouard in the older days, especially when the railroad was supposed to go north and it didn't?"

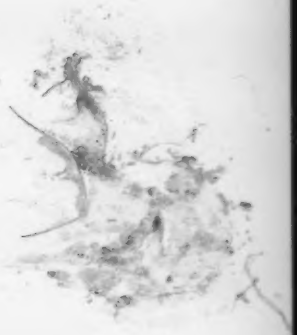
Ben: "You mean making a living?"
Sam: "Yeah."
Ben: "Well, there was fishing and trapping. That was pretty well the same thing for the Natives in Driftpile, Kinuso, all over."
Sam: "You know I kind of remember the days even in the early '40s before then, I wasn't involved but I used to hear about it, when a town like Faust, which was a small town, was very busy in the lumber industry and fishing. There was two key men there, Bill Mengey, owner of the fishery, and McRae who was involved with lumber. Do you remember a bit about how it served that town?"
Ben: "It worked good. Everybody made a living out of it."
Evelyn: "Fishing and mink ranches."
Ben: "The mink ranches, they came later. Oscar Lee was the first one to have mink. There was lots of foxes there. Oscar Lee had foxes. They used to scrape the mink and gave it to the foxes. They didn't waste much. If you had mink, you pretty well had a few foxes there too."
Sam: "I forgot about the mink industry. That was quite a big industry right after the Second World War. This whole lake frontier in the south was all mink farms."
Ben: "They used to fish herring. I tried to eat them. They tasted like hell."
Evelyn: "There was a lot of mixed marriages too. A lot of Natives marrying white guys all along the lake. His (Sam's) father-in-law, Mr. Pierce, you knew him well. He used to go with Flora Chalifoux, remember."
Sam: "It wasn't Flora. It was Julia. Flora was her sister."
Ben: "She was all crippled up. Hauled her around in a tent in the back of a truck. Pierce, he was quite a guy. He went to the coast. I guess he died there."
Sam: "He died in Cloverdale."
Evelyn: "He was a gambler."
Ben: "Oh, heck yeah. He always had the dice. You could go in the store and buy something, and I remember one time when Harry Hunt came in. He was looking at this Native studded saddle harness. So Harry said, 'How much do you want for that harness?' Well, 'to you,' he said, 'it's forty dollars. Anybody else, it's fifty.' Harry said, 'Okay, I'll take it. Let's shake on it'. Okay, out comes the dice. By God, Harry took it. Took the harness and everything."
Sam: "Just the roll of the dice, eh?"
Ben: "It was fair game."
Sam: "Is there anything else that you want to say?"
Ben: "I can't think of anything."
Sam: "Well, I appreciate this interview with this gentleman. Again I'll repeat his name, Ben Norberg who is almost ninety-two years old. Certainly good to hear an old-timer who has been here so many years and went through life like he did and still be able to remember what he did. Maybe not all of the things that he did because I know, even in my time, he did a lot of wonderful things. Us people who know him don't have to hear what he says because we know he done a lot of great things. But for people who will be listening to this tape which will be transcribed and hopefully we can bring this back to Ben and he can read it and see if it's reasonably

close to what you said. We'll try to have this presented in the closest form that you told us tonight."

Mrs. Edna Sinclair

&

Mr. Sam Sinclair



INTRODUCTION

Sometime in the early 1900s a man with an entrepreneurial spirit in his early 30s came from the northeastern United States heading north to answer the beckoning call of the gold rush and fur trade. On his way north through the Lesser Slave Lake area he met a young Indian woman, 15 years of age. They fell in love and married even though he did not speak Cree, nor she English. They travelled north together with another couple, he too a white entrepreneur and her a young Indian woman.

The first couple stayed north for some time becoming familiar with the fur industry and the Indian way of life. They eventually went back to the Lesser Slave Lake area to raise a family together. They had 11 children, 7 of whom survived. He provided for his family by setting up a store in the community. But her health did not hold up-she was struck with spinal meningitis while still a young woman. For 12 years she was bedridden. During that time she did her best to continue raising her family with help from her mother and her mother's sister. They often had to bring in hired help. She was a tiny woman with fine features who managed to continue making beautiful beadwork and even making pastry by her bedside. She always managed to have beautiful healthy plants in their home.

Her husband did everything he could to heal his wife. He took her to the best doctors he could afford so that she would be cured. But that was not to be. She passed away on New Years Eve when her eldest daughter was a young girl of 11 years, never to see her mother walk. Her husband was left in his grief to raise all 7 children with the help of his mother-in-law who spoke only Cree. Their children ranged in age from a 3 month old baby daughter to a 14 year old son. The children would no longer have the nurturing love of their mother to comfort them, nor would their father ever seek to replace her. She could never be replaced.

Her husband was known and respected in the community. He was an honest, energetic and generous man who continually gave credit to many families who did not have much to survive on. In spite of his efforts to raise his family and run his business, he could not do it on his own. He eventually lost his store. He tried other means to make a living, like mink farming. Then as time passed, he moved to the west coast to try the fishing industry. He brought with him the younger children who were not yet old enough to be on their own. His mother-in-law went west with the family to help out.

His eldest daughter was already on her own starting her own family. She married a Cree man from a nearby village. She met him when she was a young woman not yet in her 20s—he was a young man returning home from the war. He was admired and respected by many in the community. He enlisted in the army when he was a young man of 15 passing himself off as an 18 year old. It eventually would catch up with him. His mother reported to the army officials through the local priest that her son was underage. He was able to stay in the army on the condition that he complete his education. He did that and at the same time successfully polished his athletic skills as a fine boxer. After returning from the war and getting married, this young couple would have 9 children together, 6 of whom survived—3 boys and 3 girls. His wife always said that if anything were to happen to him or to their marriage, that she would never again be with another man—just as her father never wanted to replace her mother.

This man and woman are my parents, Sam Sinclair and Edna (Pierce) Sinclair. The first couple is my mother's parents, Don Pierce and Julia (Chalifoux) Pierce.

That is the story as I know it.

Jeannette Sinclair
November 13, 1998

Edna and Sam Sinclair

Edmonton, Alberta

November 1998

Sam Sinclair, interviewer,
and Damon Kapatch, recorder and transcriber

Interview of Edna Sinclair
Edmonton, Alberta
Interviewed and transcribed by Jeannette Sinclair
November 1998

Jeannette: "I just want to talk to Mom, Edna Sinclair, about memories about her mom and dad, her life at home when she was a child, about how things were in their family. Also to talk about how things changed in their childhood after their Mom died in 1937 when Mom was 11 years old. So Mom can you talk a little bit about what you remember when you were a kid?"
Edna: "When Dad was in business in Kinuso there, Mom was bedridden and Dad did the best he could. But we always had hired ladies there. Mom was good at beading, making gloves and stuff. She was really talented. Then after we decided to move to Canyon Creek and Dad was going to build a store up there. He had a log store. I forgot what year that was. That same year, Mom was still bedridden, she was bedridden for about 12 years I guess and she died New Years Eve.

But the year we moved to Canyon Creek, she took sick there in our log store. But they were going to build a new one, a bigger one, when she had her health. But then she died at New Years Eve. She had 7 of us kids. I was only about 11 years old when she passed away. My youngest sister was only 3 months old. But my grandmother and my aunt lived with us, and my dad. We had never been amongst liquor or smoking, stuff like that. We had a beautiful life. And when we lived in Canyon Creek there, Dad had cabins. It was pretty hard on us. Dad had 5 cabins there and we all had to live in the cabins. But then he made sure my grandmother and my aunt were with us until we all got married. And after we got married, Dad went to the west coast.

But then Dad always had a garden, a beautiful garden there. He had a little fish up there. I'd go on the dock and fish off the dock. And we'd pick berries. And my grandmother would go out to the bush a little ways. I was always following her because I really missed my mom so she more or less took her place. And then we went to make some sap. I didn't know nothing about sap but I'd tag along. I'd follow her. She'd have a 10 pound pail and I'd have a little 3 pound pail and we were going through the bush trails looking for birch trees. Then she'd put the pail on the birch trees all night long. Then the next morning, I'd go with my grandmother and we'd come back together with a bunch of sap in our little pails. And I'd trip over and mine would fall and dump all my little sap there. That was really something for me to experience. My grandmother snared little rabbits. My dad used to kill rabbits too, or deer. So we more or less lived off the land.
Jeannette: "Was that sap like a syrup?"
Edna: "Yes, and my grandmother made sap right behind our log store there. And my grandmother had *ogawan*, I don't know what you call that in English." (It is the rack that is made to hold large thin strips of wild meat while it is being smoked and dried for preservation.) "And she'd be sitting out in the back there boiling that sap all day. That what we'd have. And we always had a lovely garden. And we'd pick berries. It was pretty tough but my dad made sure, that we, my sister, Lily and I, enjoyed that kind of a life being so close with my grandmother, and my dad and my aunt. And us kids all being close together. We just lived right by the lake, a beautiful lake there in Canyon Creek. Every

time we'd see the moon when we were kids, coming from Marten Hills and then going down. It would come up from the mountains. It was so beautiful. It made us so lonesome, homesick. I think because of our upbringing when we were kids. We used to do a lot of sliding. My dad was very strict with us, and my brothers kind of kept an eye on us too. Like I say, there was never any booze or we were never involved with stuff like that."

Jeannette: "What about the music part, Mom,?"

Edna: "How we started our music was in Kinuso. My dad got my brother George a violin. And George took music lessons from this guy who showed him how to play the violin. And he took his lessons, then my brother George said when he played this one little tune, he says, 'I never hear from my music teacher anymore, he must have died on me,' or something like that. But anyway my dad bought instruments, a little guitar, Jimmy a banjo. And the 3 of us would all be kind of sitting around together. We all played by ear. Mom, she was a lovely singer, she had a nice voice. My dad would be sitting on the rocking chair, putting us two little girls on each side and he'd be singing, 'These two little girls, and these two little boys. . . .' or something like that. But he couldn't carry a tune. He'd be rocking away but he couldn't carry a tune, but yet he liked music. But Mom had a beautiful voice. That's where we started our music, in Kinuso."

Jeannette: "Was your mom still alive when you were taking music lessons?"

Edna: "Yes. My mom was still alive. Well she was the one that got us involved in it too because she had a gramophone there of Jimmie Rogers, and all these old records, red river jig. And she got my aunt Flora there to show us how to jig. And Mom made sure Lily and I got in there to try to do a little jig. George knows how to do the Red River jig. So Mom really got us involved in that music."

Jeannette: "Mom, if your mom was bedridden for 12 years, and she died when you were 11, that means that you never saw your mom walk then, aye?"

Edna: " I've never seen her walk. I never even seen her sit up. But Dad said he sent Mom to the best of doctors in Winnipeg, them years, on a plane. In them years, there was hardly any transportation. And they couldn't do nothing for her. I did remember once the doctor come to our store there, we were living in the store there in Kinuso. The building's still standing there. And the doctor was ready to try and lift her up and she just hollered. I remember that little part. Other than that I never even seen her sit up. She didn't look sick. But she was bedridden with spinal meningitis. That's what my dad used to say."

(Then I asked my mother to talk about when she first met Dad)

Edna: "When I first met Sammy there in Slave Lake, in his little uniform, I thought, 'I'm gonna marry this man whether he liked me or not.' So I did get married. And I'm not sorry though. We got married and we had 9 children, 3 boys died on us. We both struggled and worked hard together. We used to can a lot of berries, picking, he was always there helping us trying to survive. Being married to a politician is not an easy thing. But I kept the home fires burning. And I worked hard, and I had my garden, did a lot of canning, and vegetables. We used to scrub with a scrub board years ago, flannelette diapers. In wintertime I'd hang them out there and my clothes line would break. It wasn't an easy thing to face. But anyway I made it. I'm not sorry. I got all my children here, and I think I raised a pretty good little family. We both worked hard to bring these kids into the world. So we're not giving up yet. We got our grandchildren to be very proud of and our kids are always with us. And we love them all. We don't favour none of them. We try to treat them

all equal, same thing with my little grandchildren, and great grandchildren. So I hope that we keep in good health."
(Mom wanted to mention a bit about hunting being so much a part of our lives).
Edna: "Since we moved to Hinton, we've always had moose, killed a lot of moose there. And my little hunter's sitting right here. Maybe he can tell you how many moose we killed. But I done a lot of packing too, and skinning. My daughter Linda helped us too quite a bit, and the kids. So that was our little livelihood, our hunting."
(Dad joined us at this point)
Sam: "It's kind of in my territory when she talks about hunting. Even though I hunted a lot when I was a kid, but mainly for partridge, squirrels and what have you, and even shot rats in my little trap line I used to work at with my dad. I never could be considered a trapper. But I did get 95 rats one spring, which I think was not a bad number for a guy that's not that experienced in trapping. The moose was plentiful for awhile in the 30s. My dad used to get plenty of moose. But a sickness hit them in the late 30s. And they died off for awhile or they were missing for about a good 10 years before they came back. Then I never killed a moose till I was 31 years old. It's not because I didn't hunt. It was because there wasn't too many moose to hunt in those days. It's not like today when you road hunt and cover a lot of ground. In those days, it was all walking. If it was hunting in the summer, you had to know how to track, which I wasn't good at. But my dad was. Anyway, after leaving Slave Lake, we had plenty of moosemeat there from 1956 on when the moose really came back. We had our fair share of animals. Then we went to Hinton where there is a lot of game because you have elk, and a lot of deer. We never really ate deer meat but we did get the odd one to give away. I don't know why we don't like deer meat. But a lot of Native people don't eat deer meat. Sometimes there's a rank taste when they're mating. We got a shot of that when we were young in Slave Lake and we never forgot it, once you eat bad meat. But in Hinton, I would say in the rough, we must have got 150 animals there, over close to 20 years. That was fair share of game, but we also gotta remember we were dealing with about four houses. It was our limit. It was a good feeling when you can help somebody else. It wasn't only our family we were giving meat to. We were giving to poor people who couldn't get their own, some in Hinton and some in Slave Lake as well. When you have that kind of involvement in life and be able to hunt game and preserve it where it's possible. And not slaughter them some people do and don't even get them out at times. But I'm very proud of our livelihood within the family that we handled it right and never abused it. And later on when we got our hunting rights as Bill C-31s, even though we had hunting year round, we didn't necessarily kill more than we needed. Most of the time, 2 or 3 animals over a whole year. And later on, probably we'll only need one animal a year. We're not quite in that stage."
Edna: "Another thing too in Hinton when we had our meat, we always had a lot of our relations, we had a lot of people in our house that stayed with us, even my brothers, and Sammy's relatives, and nephews and nieces. I often think now how the heck did I ever manage to do all my kids school clothes and kept cooking for them when I got all this crew, well it must have been all year around, I used to have all these guys staying at my place. But I'm not a bit sorry. But now I can't do it because I'm a little too old. But then I was happy with all the kids that stayed with us there. I'm not a bit sorry because they were part of my family. Sammy was always a provider. He always brought grub there and I was

the cook. Every weekend I'd be making a bunch of homemade bread, and I'd make bannock, stews and soups. You could always tell Leonard, Allan Sinclair, and all them, they'd tell you all about it. That's what they lived on, homemade soup. So I am not a bit sorry that I had all those kids there. I take them just like my own family. Chuckie Beaver too, he's one of the family too."

Sam: "When you think of those days, we always enjoyed giving. And my nephews who stayed with us, some of them come from broken homes. And we help but want to help them because they were willing to work but they couldn't find jobs and I did find some jobs for them. Now they're doing well in their later years where they got jobs with oil companies, some in government and so on. But sometimes you need that little head start some place. And I never forget that. I helped people that come out of jail with no place to go. And we had a place in our basement where people used to sleep. And it's hard when you have your own family but fortunately we had an understanding, my wife and I. We tried to work as a team. Mind you, she done most of the work. But it takes a little hard work to talk too. And that's what I usually do, the talking."

(Break)

Sam: "But anyway, I'd like to mention a little bit about the other travels I had when I was in Aboriginal politics (Note: this was continuing on from the previous interview I just had with him.) I forgot to mention that when I was under the indigenous assignment, I was also in Australia and New Zealand. And the other thing we got involved in was, we had a chance to meet with the Pope in 1985. I was selected to be one of the Aboriginal politicians to deal with the Pope on our Aboriginal rights. And my wife was fortunate to go with me and I really appreciate where she had a chance to go. And meeting the Pope to some people might mean nothing, but to us it meant a great deal. It's not everyday you can meet an important man like that. And we had the fortunate opportunity to be able to sit with him for 45 minutes and discuss quite a few things. He's a very soft-spoken guy or person. He's not in a rush but he's really sincere in what he says. And I was also lucky enough to be picked as one of the Aboriginal Elders to sit on the same podium as the Pope in 1987 when he went to Fort Simpson. We were there in 1984 when he couldn't land, but he promised to come back and we didn't even go in 1987. I attended that meeting. I'll never forget when we seen some of the old Indian people from the North, the isolated areas. They probably spent their last cent to fly in to meet the Pope in 1984 when he couldn't land—and the people there were shedding tears because they missed out on meeting the Pope who is one of the great leaders of the country. Sitting beside him on the podium in 1987, in spite of the thousands of people that he meets, he remembered two of us Aboriginal leaders who met him at the Vatican in 1985. So with people with that kind of standing must have a great deal of talent to be able to remember, and pick you out when they see you the next time. It's like meeting an old friend."

Jeannette: "Can you mention a bit about your travels as President of the Veteran's Association?"

Sam: "One of the things I've been involved in the last six years, is that I've been the President of the Aboriginal Veteran's of Canada. We just had re-elections just recently and I didn't run this year, but I did run for the Vice-Presidency so I am Vice-President now. I had a lot of important trips when I was the leader. I got asked to go to the Far East which was 3 years ago—going to Tokyo, Hong Kong—visiting the gravesites of all the people

who got killed. The Hong Kong Massacre as it was called. I was just reading about it recently, they lost—in one place there were about 2000 people went in and only about 400 came out. They were either wounded or killed. I think about 600 got killed in that one—in the battle. Most of them belonged to the Winnipeg Grenadiers. And even in that group, I had a relation from Manitoba who was in that group of people who got killed. He never got killed right there, but he died a couple of years later in a prison camp. He went in as a 17 year old and he died as a 19 year old in a prison away, probably in Japan someplace. Other places that I went other than that Far East trip was Singapore, Rangoon, Burma, another small country, I think it was Ghana. It was beautiful, but Rangoon really reminded me of a poor country. It had smaller people there who were also under military rule which is communism. You could see they were really treated bad. There were thousands of them on the streets or riding by in trucks that were crowded maybe with 40 of them in the back of the truck where ordinarily there would be 20 in our military. The other place I also travelled to was Vimy, France two years ago on the commemoration of the 80 years since Vimy Ridge. It was sad—some of the things that happened there because some of them who fought there in the First World War are still alive. Some of them are close to 100. One of them who I remember well is a man by the name of Doug. I think his last name is Speers. He went over there again visiting at the Vimy site and he should be home this coming weekend—a very fine gentleman and I see some of them tell the stories about where they actually fought. They had tears in their eyes telling their story about how many people got slaughtered. It's sad because in another place there near Vimy Ridge—they called it Somme (?) or something, where there were 600 thousand casualties in less than two weeks in the British army. When you think of the senseless killing it gives you a different thought when you get old, than what I thought when I was in the army and overseas in 1944-45. Then I had a trip this summer with the 'vets' from the Atlantic War which was mainly British. Some of our country got involved, like Newfoundland, as a base for ships to land and what have you or to dock. So I can say for myself that I have been involved in a lot of things that I ordinarily wouldn't have got involved in as an ordinary citizen. So there are a few things that I did benefit from, being willing to work for nothing at times to be a representative, mainly for our people to be recognized. So our young people who will get to be men some day and remember the hardships that my fellow Aboriginal Elders went through, both in the war as a young man and towards the tail end of our lives. We were not totally treated fair. After I got out of the army, then the discrimination started. We couldn't get jobs, even though there were jobs available in government, but they weren't meant for us—later—and I kept pursuing it. I did get on with the Forestry, finally, but they never dealt with us on our lands properly under the VLA (Veterans Land Act) where others around us who were non-Native got more than a fair share of the benefits of the soldiers which was supposed to go to all. I have felt bad about that, not so much for myself even though I did get beat on land in Slave Lake where I put in for land that was 39 acres that I wanted to have to call my own. They wouldn't sell it to me because they said it was a flood hazard, part of it was under water in 1935 but certainly was dry on high ground. And eventually they sold it to some individual for an industrial area. There's been millions of dollars change hands of that very land that they denied me as a war veteran who just wanted a piece of land to live on. Those kinds of things we don't forget. And even now for me to try to get land in Slave Lake—I had a

piece of land just west of Slave Lake 5 miles—they took that away from me after I had it leased for 5 years because now they laid down some new rules that forced me out. So when you get that kind of treatment, it's pure discrimination. They won't admit it but it's there and we have no resources to fight it so we just take it and they keep on doing it to our people. I hope it will end, someday."

Edna: "Yes, I was just thinking when Sammy mentioned about this land business, or whatever, it makes me proud to see my children getting their education. There's a few of them who have their university and our grandchildren, some of them. I hope they do better because nowadays you've got to have education for anything. We didn't understand things before when we were younger. I never went far—I passed to grade 9. But after Mom died, it was pretty hard for us to go to school. So it makes me very proud for our grandchildren and our daughters to get their education."

Sam: "Yes, she's right. We're fortunate in our family that our children and our grandchildren took an interest in bettering their lives with a better education. It's not an easy task. Some of my children quit when they were in grade 12, but came back a few years later and took university and went on to get their degrees. I give them nothing but credit for doing that. It sets such a good example for the young people who are definitely struggling in the same situation at times, but who are not fortunate enough to get help at the right time to secure a better hold on qualifications in order to even get a decent job. I've said to government, I've said to whoever was willing to listen, 'We don't need necessarily to be treated special, but we want to be treated equal.' My plea is to the non-Aboriginal people who govern this country and shouldn't at times, 'We'll have people qualified some day who will govern this country, and govern it the way it should be—be fair to everybody and forget about favouritism.' As long as they legislate something to help their political cronies and their relations, they're happy. They figure that's the way life should be. But if everybody got the same preferential treatment I would say that's fair ball, but it isn't that way and I hope that whoever listens to this statement looks around him and looks at his way of life and see if they can be of some value of helping to change the rules and to be fair to others who are less fortunate and who can't talk for themselves. And sometimes they (Aboriginal people) get so frustrated they take a certain amount of alcohol or drugs, probably from the frustration and then don't make sense when they take their stand in that condition. They may rely on alcohol and drugs to be noticed. We want to be fair and square and hopefully in the future we will be treated as equals.

Jeannette: "*Ek'si*"

Interview with Sam Sinclair
Interviewed by Jeannette Sinclair
Edmonton, Alberta
Transcribed by Damon Kapatch
July 1996

Sam: "What do we want to concentrate on, right from life in Slave Lake as a kid, and on?"
Jeannette: "Yeah, I'd start out with some stuff about when you were a kid. Just things that you remember that are important to you."
Sam: "I will talk a little bit about the youth part of my life that I can remember, probably around from the 1930s on. I was born November 22,1926 in the Slave Lake area, Slave Lake, as the records show. In those days we lived in what is known as "Old Town" now. That was the main part of the town. It was a real lively little settlement in those days with mainly, probably 95% of it being Indian and Métis people. People mainly lived then, our people especially, on moosemeat, wild berries, and vegetables that people used to grow then. Not everybody had a garden—but the people who had a bit of ambition, and also along with the seed which was not easy to get at the time, to plant "spuds". It seemed like they used to help each other in those days a bit, so reasonably, most of the families, in Indian life, had small gardens. We used to have a big garden and helped others where we could. I remember some of the important things as a kid in the early 1930s, was going into the bush with our family and others generally in the fall when the moose start mating, and moose was plentiful in those days. And they used to hunt in one of the favourite hunting grounds—there was also a Native graveyard there outside the provincial park in the Marten River area, better known, in their terms, they used to call it Squaw Point. But in Cree they'd call it *Iskwew mi nî wâtim* that means "a woman point." That was one of our favourite hunting areas because they had already made racks there to hang dry meat. And I remember as a little guy, my grandmother was living then, of having six or seven racks of moosemeat, probably with five or six animals hanging there. They were important days because our livelihood was moosemeat, and dried. And I still remember as a little guy, I would say probably four or five years old when we had so much moosemeat on the wagons, we would dry it in bales like, we didn't have room for us to ride. So we were kind of running in the back, crying, naturally, and from Marten River which is generally a one day journey. It took us two days because of the slowness of the trip but it always paid off because those big bales of meat was there all winter. And she also shared that, my mother, that is, with the rest of the community who a lot of them were in desperate need of meat like that.

Then there was the berry picking days. That was more when we got a little older. The whole family sometimes would go out and live on the "ridges" of what they used to call the Jackpine ridges, they're still there. There used to be all kinds of blueberries there, and cranberries. And pretty near every family in Slave Lake gathered berries of some kind. Some picked berries a lot longer than others. I remember that old Mrs. MacDonald, who lived a little over a hundred I think, picked berries until she couldn't walk anymore. And she was quite famous for being so strong and going walking everyday, especially when the berries were ripe."

Jeannette: "Is that Bill McDonald's mom?"
Sam: "Yes. And Margaret McDonald's mom. And those early days also the trapping was pretty good. My dad always had done good trapping, that I can remember, where we used to have two clothes closets full of fur. My mother would save all this fur for the winter and they would sell it in the spring. I remember I was "nosy" as a little guy. They were counting the money and I think it was around eleven hundred dollars. Those days, that was lots of money. And there was no banks in Slave Lake, but my mom was the bank. And she was very close with her money and my dad was careless. He was the opposite way. But he used to get his odd five dollars to go to the bar and come home "sloshed" sometimes which wasn't good for the family. But it was kind of a part of a way of life but they didn't do it that often, like he didn't because of the money, my mom used to be stingy with it for reasons because that eleven hundred dollars that I'd seen that time, I think that carried us well over a year for groceries and other things we needed, clothes. Clothes were cheap those days, you could buy a lot of clothes for a hundred dollars.

And when you look back those were very important days for us. And the other thing too, I remember going to Lac St. Anne as a kid on a wagon from Slave Lake. We went on to the Holmes Trail. The trail is still there. It's not used the same way, but. . . ."
Jeannette: "What's it called?"
Sam: "Holmes Trail. I think he was some kind of a surveyor and they named that trail after him because he used to have a crew of men travel on that trail when they were surveying. They'd survey at some area all summer. They'd keep moving camp. And I remember on that first trip, probably around 1931 or '32, we came to Lac St. Anne with a wagon but I couldn't remember crossing that river but I recall there was a scow there. That's the one over by Fort Assiniboine. That's where we crossed the Athabasca River. I can just remember faintly I think we stopped on the way and did some hunting because they always wanted to have some dry meat or any kind of meat to take with them to Lac St. Anne. That was really important in those days. You were really a hero if you arrived there with some dry meat. It wasn't like now where they sell it, then, it was all give, and then there'd be some trades too. Some people would bring berries to trade for a little meat. And they also had fish, dried fish that used to be exchanged. You know you're talking about maybe four or five hundred people then at Lac St. Anne, now you're looking at anything from fifteen to twenty thousand people. There's quite a difference and a lot of changes. It's still very important, the Lac St. Anne deal, it's mainly meeting friends and also exchanging thoughts in religion, spiritualism, and in general it's a way of life of Aboriginal people. And I'm glad it's still followed. It's not necessary that people get overly wrapped up in one religion, I think the goodness of it is the spirituality of Native people being one and helping each other in thoughts and recognizing the needs of others sometimes who you don't see all year but you see them in Lac St. Anne. Ourselves, we go there now with a trailer. It's a far cry from when we used to have to stay in tents and tîpîs years ago. Nobody had a trailer that I could remember but it was a big happy family, a lot of smudges because of mosquitoes. That whole lake used to be a big smoke screen but it was there for a reason. Those are some of the things that had happened.

I also like to think back when we used to go with our dad to cut firewood, travel two or three miles to get tamarack wood. And one evening he shot a silver fox which he got fifty dollars for. And fifty dollars then was a lot of money when people were lucky to

get two dollars a day for work. So when I think of those days, they say the "good old days", some would say the "hungry thirties". But I know our family was never hungry because the animals were there and our father was a good hunter, provider. Others had real tough times. I remember white families almost starving. They used to come and get moosemeat off my dad which they didn't pay for or nothing. But some of them gave flour to my father, and some sugar. I remember one particular family used to always trade and one of my jobs with the dog team was picking up this sack of flour and sugar and leaving some moosemeat there in exchange. I didn't even see the people we were trading with but I knew who they were."

Jeannette: "Did they need permits or licenses back then?"

Sam: "No, nothing. Everybody hunted. But then they got stricter later on and started "pinching" our people, just trying to make ends meet."

Jeannette: "So it didn't matter if you were Métis or 'Treaty'?"

Sam: "No, everybody hunted. In fact, the "Treaties" I never heard of them hardly hunting then."

Jeannette: "What about white people, could they hunt?"

Sam: "No. Well they could if they wanted to live like a Native person but they didn't seem like they had the ambition. In those days, hunting was a pride almost like a professional hunter, because in the summer you had to track which I couldn't do too well. I can do a little bit now. In the winter time you could track, but it was a lot of work hunting in those days. It's not like now, you drive and road hunt and now the game is a little more available.

And I remember when my dad got "pinched" for having moosemeat. They found a cowhide (moose) and head in our old barn and there was a few others searched. There was three of them that got charged. I'd say that was probably around 1937 or '38. And they each got a month's jail.

And I often thought that was the weirdest thing they ever done to Native people, to put them in jail just trying to get food for their families. The three I can remember is my dad, Alfred Sinclair, and Vic Loyie, who also had a big family, and William Cardinal who didn't have a family but he lived with his parents, probably in their 80s, and supplied them with meat. So those the things that government shouldn't be too proud of in the way that they carried out their rules. It even got worse later on. They got stricter around when the second World War ended. I just came back from the army and they were really strict on our Indians then, to get any wild meat. Mind you there was a season for them and you had to have a license, but not everybody had money for licenses either. But that was some of the tough days.

And then in 1945 and even in the early '40s, when they started having little sawmills in the Slave Lake area, people from Wabasca started moving in because there was no work there. And I remember my first little summer job in 1941. We worked south of Slave Lake and earned a little bit of money. I think the wages then were forty dollars a month. And those were tough days. Mainly what was good about it was they fed us good in camps. The food was good in comparison to what we were used to. Lots to eat, but lots of hard work.

I remember the Cardinals moving in from Wabasca. Mike Cardinal's father, Joseph was a young man then, same with his brothers Eugene and George Cardinal. They all

worked in that sawmill that I hung around when I worked in the bush camp. I worked in the bush camp until I got injured in 1941 in the sawmill which wasn't my job. I was just "pinch-hitting."

Interview of Sam Sinclair (cont'd)
Interviewed by Jeannette Sinclair
Transcribed by Linda Anderson
and Jeannette Sinclair
November 1998

Sam: "We were just talking about my mother who passed away in September 1964, over 34 years now. I started to think about some of the things I thought I missed out on by not listening to what was said and what could have been important for us. Now when I think back to some of the things that were said, even what my grandmother said, still reflects on our life in one way or another. If we'd have listened closer to the advice, which was free, it could have been more valuable than it is now. It took that long for us to realize that some of the disagreements we gave our parents and grandparents, possibly just being stubborn, bullheaded or not knowledgeable enough to know what they were trying to emphasize strongly for the future for our life and our children and grandchildren. I can see now as a 71 year old—I'm deeply in the grandpa stage too and I think it's really worthwhile for a person to look back only for the things that were said by them to help you out as a person growing up and making decisions for the future of your own clan. I think if you have a strong family, it reflects further down the line. That link is never broken if people just play reasonably close—not copy each other—because everyone has a certain amount of talents that can't be bought because it's structured in your own experiences and your own respects—those are not totally a given thing, but are certainly given in love and respect. You got to remember that when your parents or even your grandparents give you a little scolding or a little 'hell' in our terms, there's a reason for it—number one— is love and caring. Those are so important in life. If you get the feeling that you're not even cared for by people you have to deal with, it's not a good feeling. The good feeling is to be cheerful and approach things like it's easy to do, even though you know it isn't and get people smiling. I think people are more productive when they're not saddled with little worries that get to build up inside as big worries. Then they can affect your everyday living."
(Break)
Sam: I'd like to continue talking about previous things I'd done up to 1941. I went back to school and carried out my responsibilities the best way I knew how. In June 1942 when school was out, we went looking for work. There was a sawmill that was south of Slave Lake. They called it Chisholm Sawmill which got to be Swanson Lumber Company later. After spending a bit of time at the sawmill and the bushcamp, they moved part of the crew to Mitsue Lake which had the sawmill operating from the logs that were on the lake which would come up the jackladder. This was my job to put the logs into the jackladder to be sawed up on the deck. Just a minute, I'm getting ahead of myself—that happened in 1941. Sorry. Until school started, then we went back to school. And in 1942, I had a different assignment. I got a job on the railroad between Kinuso and Assineau when they were raising the track and tamping the hard rocks so it could keep the tracks up so it would be stronger and more effective as a railroad. Part of the reason I think they were upgrading that railroad then in northern Alberta, was that the American Army was starting to use it a lot when they were going north. There were a lot of trainloads of American troops going to the Alaskan highway to help build that road and the possibility of fighting the Japanese

war from that north end. After that railroad job ended—after we finished the raising of the tracks around Kinuso and Assineau, I was fairly young, 14 or 15. The foreman gave me some of the easier jobs. One of them was digging holes under the ties so we could raise the tracks on the steel. They called me a 'groundhog' on that job because all I was doing was digging, but that was probably the easiest job on the crew and I appreciated it. But I also did a lot of work along with the foreman when it came to tamping ties which was taking a shovel with the rocks going underneath the ties so when they lowered the track we were raising it. It was solid, a solid foundation. I also remember an old fellow by the name of Dumont—he was in his sixties then—an ambitious guy. I used to sit with him on the speeder when we'd go back to our camp which was on the railroad tracks in Kinuso. He used to tell me about things. He kind of looked at me like a son and he said a lot of things that I used later on—how to work, how not to get into trouble at work and I thought he was a good man for advice. I never forget that. After the railroad job, which now is the fall of 1942, I asked my mother—I just had passed to grade 10—I asked if I could take a leave of absence, not go to school and go to work and help pay for things. I used a lot of good excuses. She said, 'Yes you can do that, but you've got to promise to go to school next year.' I got a job with an American outfit, I forgot what they called themselves, but they were the ones who put in the telephone lines from Edmonton to Dawson Creek, the additional telephone lines There was one that existed already— it was there by the railroad. They were putting in this line so they had to hire people on the telephone line itself but that was pretty well taken by American personnel. Some of them were soldiers and some were civilians from the United States. It was their project, but I think they should have hired more Native people on it and they hired me as a flunky, if you want to call it that. Then I got to wait tables which was a little more prestigious because I got to wear white. I felt I was already in the army or something. At that time the ordinary wages in the sawmill was probably around 60 cents an hour. We were getting, for starters $1.75 per hour, so I was a well paid 15 year old. My mother was really happy for me and I eventually gave her a good chunk of money two months later when I went in the army. That was almost by accident when I joined the army in late 1942. That telephone work that we had—we were staying in box cars along the railroad track in Slave Lake and the next place was Wagner. When they disbanded the camp, I was in charge of the trainload of stuff that was going to Edmonton. They told me to watch everything especially the meat—the beef. And one of the things they did say to me though was not to be afraid to give away the meat because by the time they get it all straightened out in Edmonton it might spoil even though it was early winter and cold. I don't know what they were thinking but I readily gave away quite a bit of meat in Slave Lake and unfortunately I didn't have time to tell my family that I was going that suddenly so they didn't get much meat that I gave away. I gave away rolls of bologna, big rolls, and big strips of bacon to whoever was available there at the railroad tracks. And then we went on the train and once the trainmen knew I was in charge of the two boxcars practically full of groceries they kind of—we stayed over in Smith—the train used to stop at Smith before it went to Edmonton and they started bribing me, bringing me pop and have me ride in the caboose in the back where you'd sit way up and I was a little king then. I gave them probably a couple hundred dollars worth of meat—the trainmen. They were very happy and thought I was a good guy. Those were the days when everybody had a tough time. The employment

thing was starting to break open in the North and a lot of people were getting jobs that didn't have jobs before. But most of our younger people then by that time had joined the army. I joined, like I say, in November 1942 in the late stages of November and the main reason I know the others joined was because there was no work and they heard that in the army they were getting a dollar and a half a day, free room and board, and clothes—the uniforms. So that was going through my mind too. It wasn't yet guaranteed to have a job in Alaska highway but they thought they could use me, which would be good wages and I would have had a new experience. But the thing that I remember best, when I went in the army— it was the first time I had ever seen a city. I think the biggest place I had seen in those days was High Prairie. So when we got to Edmonton we stayed on Jasper Avenue, 101st Street, there was some building they rented there, that's where we stayed. I'd get on a streetcar and I always knew that it was a red and green streetcar and that was the 'Calder' one. I live in the Calder area right now. But I'd got on it and I forgot the address where I was staying. And I know I rode that thing that evening twice around because I didn't know where to get off. And finally the street conductor noticed me and he said, 'Haven't you been riding a little longer than usual?' he said. And I said, 'Sir, I don't know exactly where I live, I said if I recognize any place,' I said, ' I will tell you to stop and I'll find my way.' I forgot to mention Jasper Avenue because I didn't know it had that name at the time. So he said, 'Come and sit in the front with me and you watch every building we go by.' And he kind of explained to me the full circle they made on the bus tracks. I sat in the front and I remember picking the Pan American Cafe, roughly around Jasper Avenue 101st or 102nd Street, in there someplace. And that was the closest big cafe to where we were stationed or put up by the American company. About the same time, they had about $700.00 worth of cheques for me that had been building up since I started, I hadn't had any advances except what I borrowed from my mother who let me know about every second day before I left, 'When am I going to get money back?' she'd say. And when I had that $700.00 worth of cheques I was a little nervous about it because I heard about these guys being "stealers" in Edmonton and this one white guy said to me, 'Don't worry about it, when it's a cheque they can't cash those cheques,' but I wonder now if that was true. Anyway I finally cashed it. I went to a bank which was a Bank of Montreal on 101st Street and Jasper Avenue. I put the money in and I was still packing around $100.00, I guess, in cash which was a lot of money in those days. I never forgot the money I owed my mother, but I never had any way to send it quick like so I left it in the bank. And by that time I met some young fellows, one I knew from the High Prairie area named Lawrence L'Hirondelle and he said, 'We're going to join the army tomorrow.' And he said , 'Why don't you come with us?' I said, 'I can't go, I'm only 15 years old,' just a few days before I was 16. 'Oh heck' he said, 'you look big enough you won't have trouble passing.' So I did go the next day to the Prince of Wales Armories, signed up and when it come to me they said, 'How old are you?' And I said, 'I'm eighteen.' He said, 'Do you have anything to prove it?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'What about your registration card?' At that time your social security card was called a registration card. 'No' I said, 'I lost it.' which I didn't. I wasn't even old enough to have one—that was the true story. So he said, 'What about your birth certificate, do you have one?' I said, 'No, no such thing.' Then told me to go and sit down because he had guys to deal with so I went and sat down. And a Sergeant came to talk to me, which I didn't know how important a Sergeant was—to me he looked like a

General. I was scared of everybody in the power structure. He said, 'I'm from High Prairie.' And the first thing he said to me was, 'Whose your parents?' I said that I didn't have any because I couldn't tell about my parents because I was trying to lie my way into the army. And I couldn't be telling where I come from or they'd be catching me the first day. Anyway he said, 'Young fella, if you really want to go in the army and if you are lying about your age'— he looked straight at me and it scared me besides—'he said, 'just stick to your word if you're 18 years old or even if your not, say you're 18 and don't change your story.' That made me a little braver and sure enough about an hour later he told me to go to the desk and heck they never asked me any questions. They said, 'Sign here.' He had went and talked to them. 'Sign here.' And there I was and in two hours time they had uniforms thrown at us and said, 'Put these on.' And those army packs we had to put together—it was almost impossible because I didn't know what all those buckles were all about—and different things. By 5 o'clock we had our uniforms on and I remember I went and looked in a mirror and I looked like a scarecrow because the uniform was a little too big for me. But I didn't get it changed until the next day. Anyway I went up town trying to show off, I guess. I was a soldier and I had money too. I picked up a few 'friends' when they knew I had money and I arrived in some cafe on 101st Street— I think they used to call it the International Cafe. And I met two women from Slave Lake. It was Melanie Bottle and her daughter and they said, 'What happened to you—you join the army?' I said, 'Yes I joined and I got my uniform today.' But,' I said, 'if you people would not squeal on me and tell my mother I'm in the army I will buy your supper and everything.' 'Okay, okay we'll eat your supper,' and they assured me they wouldn't squeal on me. And it was two days later I got called in the office. The minute Mrs. Bottle told my mother I was in the army she went over to the priest. There was no phones in the Native sector in those days. I think there were only about three phones in Slave Lake, then, we only had about 300 people. Anyway she got hold of the priest and the priest phoned the army there in Edmonton and said I was only 15 and should be let out because I wasn't old enough to fight. So I still held to my word what that Sergeant told me, 'Just say you're 18 and don't say anything more.' I was so nervous that when I had to march in to meet that—I don't know if he was a Major, some officer anyway. And I had to salute him and I knocked my cap off because I was so nervous. I had one of those little peaked caps. It didn't sit too well on my head anyway and I started to wobble because I was standing too still because I didn't know how their marching orders were. I hadn't been trained yet, so that guy who marched told me to sit down before I fall because he said I was weaving. I did sit down but an officer came in and I had to jump up again . So he told me, 'You know Father Kinderwater?' And I said, 'Yes, I know about him.' But I had already said my home area was Grouard which was about 80 miles away. And they asked me a few more questions. And all that officer said to me was, 'Sinclair, if you tell the truth today and you're underage we'll let you out quietly and you'll get an honourable discharge, but if we find out later that you stayed in and you lied you'll get a dishonourable discharge and also you will probably will go to jail.' He was talking very firmly and that scared me. So anyway, he said, 'Take him away and we'll see him in a few days.' And the more I talked to people in the army I guess there were a lot more underage guys in there that I didn't know of and they said there was no way they were going to throw me out as long as I stuck to my word. Well I got braver. But if my mom would have walked in there and said, 'This is my son and he's

underage,' I would have had to give in to my mom. But it didn't happen that way because to come to Edmonton was a big thing for Native people who never left Slave Lake—some of them. To do that would have been too big of a job for my mom. Anyway, I stayed in and took my basic training in Edmonton. A lot of my marching was in the Prince of Wales Armory which is still up here in Edmonton. I went on to Prince George after basic training, Red Deer for awhile, and took more training in parts of BC, like Terrace. And in the summer I got sent to Wainwright. The first year I drove a motorbike, training and a little bit of truck driving. My biggest problem was to try to get my standing orders, what they call a license—in truck driving. It was hard because I never rode in a vehicle in Slave Lake, let alone drive one. So there was a lot of strikes against us Indian soldiers especially the young ones because we had no experience. Nowadays a lot of people are driving when they are 14. After training sessions in Wainwright they still had me down as potentially underage and so on. For awhile I was even on 'boys pay' which was only 90 cents a day, while this thing was pending. And I didn't want to argue because I would have gotten kicked out. I took some schooling in, I think it was Val Cartier, Quebec. It was a French camp anyway. I took my upgrading in, I think it was three subjects—mainly mathematics, and geography and science, I think. Anyway with all the extra help I had in that short time I was there, which was about four months probably or more—that was in 1944. Then D-Day came up in 1944 when a bunch of Canadians were killed in France. They called for us and they called for all of the young fellows that were available at the school and I was one of them. I was sent back to Wainwright to go to my own unit. And in the meantime I had volunteered while I was going to school, that I wanted to join the paratroopers. And they said I was the right age to do it so they had me down to join the paratroopers. So when they rushed me back to Wainwright, I went to the officer and said—first they told me I was going to Calgary to take more training and possibly go overseas—so I asked the officer, I said, 'What about this promise, you guys gave us that I might end up in the paratroopers?' 'Oh that's still intact. You take your training in Calgary and they'll go from there. You'll probably go to Sharwell, Manitoba.' So I was quite happy and went to take training in Calgary in the infantry, three months. Then I got a leave before I went overseas—that's in the fall of '44. Then I went overseas and trained some more in England. I was a full-fledged 17 year old then. I went on to northwestern Europe as a reinforcement and I ended up in the Calgary Highlanders. Anyway, the short stint I was in the army, I did have some front-line duty which was right on the tail end of the war, probably the last three weeks of the war, and the war ended. I was in a place called Frank, Germany and from there, the non-fraternization rule was set. We couldn't talk to the German people, but most of them couldn't talk English anyway. We were staying in schools and other buildings that weren't used and from there I got involved in sports which I already had been in boxing in England. I fought for the championship in England in early 1945. In a quick session, I fought six fights in the Netherlands and I won the middleweight title of the Canadian Army at that time in that area because a lot of places, when you fought for the Canadian championship not everybody had a chance to participate because we were too scattered—probably too costly to bring them in. I always remember when I won the championship, shortly after, I had in the mean time, volunteered to go to the Far East. The Japanese War was still on at the time. So I was called in one day and they said, 'You're going home.' And that's after winning the middleweight title, about a week later. I

was so excited. And I didn't know I was already picked to go with the Inter-allied Boxing Tournament in French Morocco where Marcel Surdan came from. And I was in the same weight class as he was and I often think back, 'I wish at least I would have went maybe I would have had the chance to fight him.' To get to any championship in a tournament usually you have to fight at least three times. And as we all know—people who know boxing—Marcel Surdan, shortly after the war, won the middleweight title of the world and got killed in a plane crash coming to a fight in New York to fight Jake LaMotta. When I think back it would have been great to at least rub shoulders with that great fighter. But it didn't happen that way. I got a couple weeks leave. So I went to Scotland before I went to Canada. And I met a young man there that I recognized, mainly because of his freckles because the Pierce family have a few freckles on each one of them—some had more— Jim had the most probably. Anyway, we got talking and he knew me to see me and we went on a few little binges and then he told me, he said, 'Make sure when you get back,' he said, 'I'm going to Germany after this and when you get back to Slave Lake make sure you visit my family in Canyon Creek.' I told him, 'I'll see, I have no vehicle but I'll find a way.' I guess it was maybe a month or so after I got back to Slave Lake I decided I'd better go to Canyon Creek and visit. I knew of Mr. Pierce who used to own a store when I was a kid years ago in the late thirties because my mother used to give dry meat to Mrs. Pierce. Anyway I got acquainted with Jim's sister Edna Pierce, the one I've been married to now for close to 52 years. We're very fortunate in a lot of ways, even with the struggles we had. We raised six children, we lost three, but with the six children we raised there's three girls and three boys who are adults now. We also have 15 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. So with that there's a lot of love in our family and there's always happiness when we deal with grandchildren. They seem to be a little more exciting than your own when you get older. And it's not because of a lack of love, it's just a different kind of involvement. You're more or less a kind of a 'spoiler' if anything. You give them things that they don't even have to earn. One time when we got something as kids it was because we did a little extra chores or a little extra something.

In my days after I got out of the army I worked in small sawmills around Slave Lake, and also cutting pulpwood which we had to peel sap, peel spruce, the odd pine. That was tough work. I worked in places like Dawson Creek , Hart Highway, BC, for the BC Packers and all this time I was also doing some boxing. I turned pro in 1949. I fought 8 rounds in Legal. I had 16 pro-fights here, mostly in Edmonton and I won 14 out of 16. One thing lead to another. I trained 5 boxers from 1961 to possibly 15, years later. I was still assisting but I was not really running a boxing club like I did in Slave Lake and Hinton. I feel good about some of those accomplishments because it did help some who did good in boxing and went on to—some of them even got a little better education. And some accomplished better jobs by being affiliated with boxing to some degree. I wish more of that was done. But I wish also for the ones who accomplished something in the athletics, would work harder in the working sector to prove themselves in the better stages of the work world where labour jobs are not as plentiful. You have to be more qualified as a technician or other trades that weren't even around in our day. I also feel good about the boxing side of it. My son and I, Gordon, who was probably one of the better amateur boxers in Canada in the late '60s and early '70s. We were both, myself supposedly a successful trainer and coach and some in boxing— I won a middleweight

title—I didn't get it handed to me on a platter—I had to win three fights in a row to do it. We got sworn into the Boxing Hall of Fame in Canada, January 8, 1994. So that's another reason for a proud little feeling for an accomplishment I didn't even know existed. I guess somebody kept track of our deals and when we were recommended right away by the Amateur Boxing of Canada."

Sam: "I guess I'd like to talk a little bit about the work I'd done right after I came out of the army. Besides working in the sawmills and few other places, I'd like to talk about one of my tough experiences—falling timber with a big cross-cut saw—and I had a big Ukrainian fellow as my partner, strong as a bull and heavy as half of one because he rode the saw a lot. We 'fell' all winter with a cross-cut and we averaged $18.00 a day for the whole winter which was a record at that time. Everybody else was working for about 80 cents an hour in the sawmill, and the bush people as well. After that time, I also done some other falling with a Swede saw and a cross-cut but then the powersaw started coming into the picture and we logged a bit with the powersaws too—a couple seasons anyway. It was quite a difference and the work was still hard, but it seems like when you work, you also eat well and stay pretty healthy. After those kinds of jobs, I got a job in Slave Lake around 1951 to work in a 'planer', a planer mill. I was put in charge within a month to be the foreman of that group and there was a little sawmill that moved into the same area, so I was in charge of around 40 men. Again, I was doing some boxing in Edmonton. The first fight I had the second time (post-war boxing) was in 1949. When I worked in that sawmill, it really helped the Aboriginal people in Slave Lake because there was no work other than the sawmill. They had a small bit of work by the Swanson Lumber Company, but their main connection was the hamlet of Chisholm. There was some that lived in Slave Lake but worked in Chisholm and only went home on weekends. It always reminds me of some very important things in the early stages of being in charge of our own people working on the lowest paid jobs that were around there, but still made a living in doing it. I remember picking up guys who were late for work—they were from Wabasca. And they were set up in tents during the summer months and I'm not so sure they'd been drinking, but I suspected that they were. But I was a drinking man myself then so I didn't question it too much because I'd have felt guilty. So this one guy said to me once, 'Could I have breakfast before I go to work?' And I told him, 'Sure, come in.' And all he had to eat was bannock which looked a little old to me and he had tea. I had a cup of tea with him and that's all he had to eat for breakfast and for lunch he also took a chunk of bannock and a pail for tea that he'd make out there—this was hard work that they were doing in the planer—it was fast—they had to move around fast. Some of them were piling lumber. That was steady work. But I often thought, 'How many young people could survive under the same conditions?' Bannock is good, but just to have bannock and tea is not really a full meal, in my books. But they did it because it was for their family. They had to work to get groceries. Also the conditions they had to live in—in a tent. It was terrible when it rained because they had these little cheap tents and most of them leaked, but they stuck with it though and some of those people who stayed in Slave Lake got to do better for themselves. They built a little better houses, not much better than shacks but still comfortable and their offspring now live in Slave Lake—their grandchildren there and there's a lot of success to what they did—maybe not comparable to white people's success—but for me to know about their 'grassroots' to their present situation, it's success.

A lot of the old people have passed on and the people there now are my age and under and we talk about these things sometimes and laugh about it even though it's no laughing matter. But one thing you cannot take away from Aboriginal people is that they enjoy talking about some of the tough things they had to do as a young man and they kind of make a humorous story out of it instead of feeling sorry for themselves. We have that as a gift, I think in our lives. A lot of our people laugh and mainly they make fun of themselves and never take things too serious. I see other people who are more serious in everything—never smile—I wonder how they can work 8 or 10 hours being in an ugly mood. Sometimes they perform right in the work site. After that experience, I also worked in the fish plant in B.C.— I think I mentioned it earlier. I worked for B.C. Packers for a season and a half, which is a year and a half. That was a good experience. And later on after I worked at the sawmill with Ed Only in Slave Lake, I got a job for the Mid-Canada Radar Line. It was the next line from the North. There was the DEW Line, and the Mid-Canada Radar Line was the next one. I started off in labour and in a few days I got to be labour foreman. We made good money. We also had really good food given to us. If it wasn't given to us, we took it anyway. It was called surplus goods. They had lots of extra food and a lot of it was wasted. But towards the end we didn't waste any. We all got our share because it was more or less agreed upon at least with the local authority and I was one of the foremen and I also was one of takers as well. So how could I disapprove of something when I was just as much to blame one what some other people would call, maybe, stealing. I didn't call it stealing. The part of the millions of dollars I think the Mid-Canada Radar Line—the contract we were on cost 360 million dollars when it was budgeted for 250 million originally. So there was a lot of money spent and wasted at that time because they never did really use the Mid-Canada Radar Line as a safety technical outfit to really look after the second portion of the North from enemy attacks coming from Russia. They were worried about that after the Japanese War ended in 1945. So overall, it was a good experience and good pay. But it petered out in the Slave Lake area in early 1957. From there I worked for Canadian Utilities, digging power pole holes—a lot of hard work. I did other things for that same company. Then I went on to be a truck driver for the Forestry where I was first interviewed by Indian Affairs to be an Indian Agent. And I got turned down twice on that particular thing, probably because I said the wrong things when I was interviewed because I always believed in speaking the truth. I remember one of the things I said that maybe had a lot to do about me not getting a job. They asked me, which was a tough question, 'Are we doing too much for the Indians or not enough?' I think I remember saying that they were doing a lot of the wrong things, by not having enough jobs for people who need to make a living. They do not say you are wrong or that you are right but when I didn't get the job, I kind of thought that. That was the last question they asked me. Anyway, when I got back to Slave Lake, the interview was in Peace River, I often wondered if it was stacked at the time. The guy who interviewed us was Allan Sinclair, no relation of mine. Anyway, after I got back about 2 or 3 days later, the Superintendent of the Forestry, by the name of Mr. MacGregor ran into me up town and asked me how I made out on the interview. I told him that I didn't make out too good and he said, 'They didn't hire you?' And I told him, 'No.' They said they were going to write me a letter, but I could see it was a 'no'. When I failed that interview it was the second time I asked for that job at Indian Affairs. I think the first time was in 1946 when I was

discharged from the army. Anyway, Mr. MacGregor asked me, 'How would you like to work for the Forestry?' And I said, 'Yes, what doing?' And he said, 'Whatever you think you can do.' I said that I could drive a truck or I could do labour work, but mainly I'd be interested in getting to be a Forest Ranger. Those days they called them Forest Officers and within a short time I got a call from a guy by the name of Elmer Johnson who was one of the finest guys I ever worked with. He asked me if I could drive truck for him and I said, 'What doing?' and he told me I would haul steel to some of the northern areas, north of Grouard, Whitefish Tower and Red Earth Tower. I told him, 'Sure I could drive a truck.' So I drove truck that fall—it was winter actually. I did labour work as well and in the spring of 1958 after we worked on the winter project on the Wabasca road, burning brush. I was in charge of the group, an Aboriginal work project. Then that spring, after working for a while on the Wabasca road, fires started breaking out so I went to the fire and looked after that. All of a sudden I got called in—I was in the Swan Hills area then—they asked me if I wanted to be a Forest Officer. At the time I was getting $600.00 a month with my truck and myself. I thought it was pretty good pay, so when I got called in by the Superintendent and asked what they'd pay me as a Forest Officer they said $250.00 a month as an Assistant Forest Officer—$250.00 a month plus Forestry clothes and you'll be allowed for meals when you travel and so on—I thought quick-like. In my mind, that was kind of a demotion. He said I was promoted from $600.00 a month to $250.00 a month—to me that was a demotion, but I didn't say that because I needed the work. I took the job and worked as an Assistant Ranger on fires. That year we had a lot of fires. I was away from home for nine weeks in one stretch. Nine months later I got promoted to a full-fledged Ranger and I was assigned to the Red Earth District. Within a short time—within a year, I was in charge of District 32 which is north of Slave Lake probably around two-thirds of the way to Wabasca, and Nipisi and all those areas. It was interesting work for me because it was dealing with the bush and dealing with our Aboriginal people. We had a lot of people on the fire line. At one point we had as many as 400 under my wing. You get a lot of headaches, but once you're organized it's almost like an army—it works almost systematically—people were more involved in organization and understood what they were doing. From there after I worked nine and a half years in Forestry, I transferred to an organization called Community Development in 1965. I went back to Forestry in 1966 for a while and left Forestry for good in late 1966. I often missed that kind of work, but I was promoted to a higher paid job as a Community Development Officer. I got transferred to Hinton in 1967 from Slave Lake and I was in charge of Aboriginal people in that northwest section counting Grande Cache, Jasper, Edson, Whitecourt and those areas. That was one of my toughest assignments because it was dealing with people who really had problems with finding jobs, everything in general. There was liquor problems, there was domestic problems and what have you. I dealt with them all because then they didn't have specific officers the way they do now. The job I did in Hinton actually represented about four jobs. I often think back to the accomplishments that they made as workers—from living in a shack to living in probably a $75,000 - $100,000 home today and some of them have number one trailers. These were some of the people that were denied jobs from Northwest Pulp and Power Company which is a pulp mill. The lack of jobs still exists in those areas. But when you look at those who have been successful, sometimes they don't get the credit that they deserve—because some of those people like

the Beaverbones actually did the most successful work at the start by cutting pulp wood then in eight foot lengths and piling them by hand. They really did lovely work. We used to see their work on the sidehills, all neatly cut and piled. Probably the most underprivileged people in those days were the Grande Cache people—some with Indian status—but didn't know it at the time and were counted as Métis even though they were Indians all of their lives. There's that foolish 'status'— nowadays even with the Bill C-31's, which we are, and have less privileges than the other Treaties who live on reserves and have a lot of services that others don't get. I have nothing against Aboriginal people who have rights, but the Government should understand people with Indian ancestry should be treated equally. Everybody should be the same in line with educational services, health and welfare, and everything else that goes with it. If they looked at Indian status people and the Métis and Bill C-31's, they're all one people really. Too look at them, the general public says they're Indians, but when it comes to dealing with them, they're no longer Indians because the government has got it structured in a way that there's discrimination. I'd like to live long enough to deal with those issues because it's very important for the future of the young people, especially in the education programs that are needed to assist them to get through the obstacles that are ahead in life. One of them is education and other levels—trades that they can learn through some of the grants that are available. Some of them are overlooked because of the rulings of the government sectors who do discriminate against our people. But a lot of times it's not reported and they get away with it. My hope is that those kinds of things improve. During the many years I worked as a Community Development Officer, they changed the names, but the work was always the same. I was a Human Resources Officer and then I got an Economic Advisor position and then an Economic Development Officer. In 1976 I got transferred to Edmonton to do supposedly other things. They were always related to Aboriginal people, but now I had a lesser role because I wasn't directly connected to the people who needed the help—that was Grande Cache and others like Marlboro who also did good in their day by getting a little help and the rest they did themselves. Hinton also advanced in a lot of ways with the Beaverbones group. We formed a company there called—at the start it was called Marlboro Co-op. They had the contract with Northwest Pulp and Power, but all the work was done by the Beaverbones group who were called in Cree, 'Rocky Mountain Indians.' With that involvement, they formed—as an offshoot of Marlboro Co-op—Fox Creek Development Corporation which is still in existence and this was over 30 years ago when I registered that company in 1968. So I feel good when I still go around Hinton and hear about those people still working. And it goes to show that if you give the down-to-earth people a break, sometimes they can go a long ways—not get rich, but certainly make a decent living—that's what we're all about. I've talked about the work I was involved in Hinton and Slave Lake, but another thing I got involved in after I got on in the Forestry was that I started coaching baseball in the Peewee ranks and I also played baseball myself in the senior ranks. A lot of the kids got into the senior calibre by sticking with the ball teams that I coached. I think coaching is very important in life because most of our Aboriginal young people are good athletes—a lot of 'naturals.' And they take a liking to being competitive especially beating their own kind—that is, another team from the Native sector. That was some of the things that helped me in life too, being involved and see young fellows develop. And you've got to remember that some of the young fellows who

went to boxing and baseball didn't need much equipment. You could belong to it just by having one glove and maybe running shoes. In boxing you need maybe a jock strap, a towel and so on. The rest of the equipment is generally supplied by the local boxing club. The boxing club I started in Slave Lake in 1961 was sponsored a bit by the Canadian Legion who helped us with the first $100.00 to get going. From the small hamlet of Slave Lake, then, maybe there was a thousand people there, I'm not sure in the early '60s. They went on to win championships in the provincial level and the golden glove level which was all the provinces. With about 3 years experience, I remember bringing in a group, out of ten fighters, and nine of them being winners with the Southside Legion Boxing Club. So when you look at those kind of accomplishments in a short time, when the kids are given a chance, it makes you feel good. And you've got to remember also, most of these young fellows that I had were from 'broken' homes—very poor—a lot of them. And they had no direction, and more or less, poor discipline because of lack of parenthood. And some of it was alcohol related but it wasn't the kids' fault. They participated and some of them got to be good athletes. From the Slave Lake Boxing Club—and also the baseball—we won a number of championships from that area, I got transferred to Hinton in 1967 to do that other work in Community Development. I also took a couple fighters with me—one of them was my son. Another young great fighter was Walter Davis, who died as an eighteen year old in an accident in Slave Lake. But we started a club there in Hinton too. Same structure—mainly the boxers were Aboriginal but the others got equal opportunity. And we had good White boxers as well. I think one of the good things too about being involved as a coach or manager like I have, you gain respect from the young people. Not because of the discipline only, but the love and care, and kind of looking after them like they're your own—you get kind of a family feeling. And I always spent a lot of my own money because these kids were poor. Most of the time they never had a cent to spend when we had to go all the way to Calgary to participate in boxing with no spending money for the poor ones. But we always found enough, that they could have, besides their regular meals, have some ice cream or something—it's not the diet for boxers but doesn't hurt to have a bit of 'sweets' once in awhile.

One of the good things being a coach or manager is the recognition that is given to you after being involved. I guess altogether I was involved at least fifteen years. But I see them now, they are men and some of them got to be good providers and got good jobs in the oil industry and few other things. They still look up to me good, like a friend, but they respected me because I was their coach. And that also makes you feel good, because I thought sometimes, because I was strict with them at times—I only was strict with them just like you are with your own children because you love them. And I trained those people the same way. I got after them because I liked them and I also knew if they followed the rules—my rules in the sport field, that they would be winners if they just stuck to the tough training and also a lot of times you had to only eat certain things. I often remember a few things that did happen in Slave Lake. I mentioned that we had a lot of poor kids—when one young fellow—the poor guy's dead now, but I told him that they had to watch what they ate before going to Calgary for the 'weigh in' for the provincials. And they lived in Rabbit Hill in Slave Lake, it used to be called—a poor section of the people that lived there. He said, 'What can I have to eat?' Like, that night—we were going to leave early the next morning. 'Well,' I said, 'toast and tea would be all right.' But toast

with no butter or jam, because the one I was talking to was a bit overweight and had to get some pounds off of him just the last day. And we pulled in early in the morning, about six o'clock, we were heading for Calgary. I had kind of a van then—a panel. And he come running down the hill, about six inches of snow on the hill—he came running down—and he had one of the bigger slices of bannock I've ever seen with jam dripping down and he was taking bites of it really happy. And I said, 'What the heck's the matter with you Charlie, you're not supposed to have any of that—you've got to lose weight.' 'Well', he said, 'that's all I had to eat—there's nothing else in the house.' So then I thought, 'I can't give him hell—the poor kid hasn't got much choice.'

But those are the kinds of things you remember that other people would never see in their life. But he went on to win the championship in his weight, regardless of what he had for a diet. That goes to show your determination and your ability has a lot to do with success as an athlete."

(Break)

Sam: "I'd like to talk a little bit about my political experiences on the Aboriginal level. After working in government in different levels, for just a little under 25 years, I was approached by a Native group in Hinton—including one of my daughters who was involved—if I would run for the presidency of the Métis Association of Alberta. And that was sometime in July in 1979. So I told them I wasn't sure what I was going to do—at that time I was kind of looking after the logging operation for Fox Creek Development Association. So I said, 'I'll let you know in a week.' And I actually knew within two days that I could leave. So, the ones that had hired me said, 'Take a leave of absence and if you lose, you'll come back to us.' So with that understanding, I decided I would run for that position. And I always remember the date was August 19, 1979 when I run for presidency which was done in Athabasca, Alberta. And I won the presidency not knowing I was going to stay that long. But they were two year terms at that time and I won four in a row, which I served eight years as the President of the Métis Association of Alberta.

I often look back and I think I made the right move. I'd have been sorry if I hadn't have tried it at least. Because I remember when I was a kid in Slave Lake, around 1938, I can recall, which I would have been 12 years old. There was a little Métis Association meeting in the Slave Lake Legion Hall—it was to talk about trap lines—and they used to call it the 'Half-Breed' Association then. My dad was invited because he was a trapper, but he didn't want to go because he was hard of hearing. So my mother said, 'You go in your dad's place and report back to me what was said.' I really enjoyed that because that gave me a chance to nose into something that I always wanted to listen to—that was older people. And to make it more interesting, the guest speaker that night was Peter Tomkins, who was one of the better Native politicians in the country who had a good understanding of the White politics. And the Association was just starting those years—I think it was only four years then. I think the Association started around 1934—but that I am not too sure of. They really impressed me at the meeting. It was all spoken in Cree. Everybody was Cree-speaking then. And my cousin, named John McGillis, was with me. So after we finished, well naturally I had to go home and report. But I said to John on the way, 'I'm going to be one of those guys someday.' I meant the leader, because they impressed me in a way I took an interest in, helping people even as a kid. But it took quite a few years, roughly forty-one years. . . ..So it took that long for me to get in as leader but I never tried

it before. But I was involved in Native politics even when I worked for Forestry—and that was trying to get jobs for them—and I did that on my own. But once I got recognized by industries, they always came to me when they wanted men in the Native sector. And I appreciated that help. And after being elected in 1979, the first thing was we had to organize a Board which was also elected. But we had to sort them out on responsibilities. And that is something I always look at even today, a lot of people think politics is an easy job. To do a political job right, it's not easy. It's a twenty-four hour a day job. You can't get it out of your system if you want to be effective. And I used to wake up in the morning and I even dreamt of things I did that I was supposed to do the day before. And people that think politics is so easy, generally off the street—and when they get in there, they don't know what to do because they have no experience. And they think everybody should jump every time they say something and that's not the way I work in politics. I try to get along with people and try and win their confidence that you can be a nice guy when you want to do things and they are also nice to you too. But if you want to start hollering at people, they holler back and generally their voice is louder. So I must have been at least semi-successful—I won four terms in a row at two-year terms which was eight years. I didn't run the fifth term—I think I could have won but I didn't run. Altogether, I served 12 years on the executive level plus I was a card-carrying person since 1970. So altogether I think I put in forty or more like fifty years of my life in politics. And I also served on the Town Council. I was elected in 1965 for two years, but I only served one year because I got moved to Hinton. But I've seen people say that they were the first one elected in Council on the Aboriginal level in the Slave Lake area. I was the one but I never questioned it. It's okay if they feel that way. Sometimes people are misread or misunderstood and they don't include you in a lot of decisions later on just for reference. So with all that, I can talk for days on Native politics—good and bad—but the main thing is we lasted that long. And I had tough Boards to deal with—that's part of the reason I left there is it got so it was kind of a split politics. We had twelve Board members and towards the end there six would be on my side and the other six were the opposition. And I had to break the tie and I only voted when there was a tie. But after three ties in a row in a period of about six months, I finally told the Board, I said, 'Why don't you guys let me run the show because each time there is a tie-breaker, I am the one that broke it and it went the way, I was thinking.' They kind of laughed and they thought it was a joke, but I meant it because if I am going to break ties all the time, that means I am running the show. But anyway, they quit fighting after that so that kind of helped for it to happen that way.

One of the brightest spots of my life in politics was I got to deal with five Prime Ministers altogether. But one who always impressed me the best was the first one I dealt with, Pierre Trudeau. He was fair whatever he did, and he was very precise on what he said. If he said, 'Yes,' on something he did it. I remember one time we were there negotiating for some money, I think it was around 1980. And one of the senior bureaucrats who was in charge of the funding—or he had some connection—he was quite high in government and so Trudeau turned around and said, 'These people need some money,' he said, ' what's their chances?' And this guy said, 'We're broke.' And Trudeau said, 'You get some money, whatever they need.' The guy never said another thing and he walked out. That means, we got our money in a couple days. But a lot of people will give you the run around. I'm still dealing with government trying to get funding for our

Aboriginal veterans. Now there don't seem to be too many that can make a decision on what is possibly effective for us—and very positive when you let us have some money, we want to do things for the good of our Aboriginal people and sometimes it's looked at by the senior bureaucrats in governments as a negative idea. They always think it's their money they're dealing with, not knowing all the money from taxes that come from this country are the former resources that was owned by Aboriginal people alone. So I wish they'd give that a thought sometimes, because you got to be fair. That's why I always say we don't necessarily need special treatment but we want to be treated equal. And they have trouble doing that."

(Break)

Sam: "I guess some of the things too that's very important to us is that we are having trouble now retaining our Indian status, we used to be Métis but under the different legislation that was made in 1985 to reestablish Indian status for the ones they illegally left out for years. And under the Bill C-31s, there was some crazy rules there, and one of them they are using for an excuse for our family is the land scrip. That was fraudulent in a sense. Mr. Trudeau made that statement in 1982 or '83 before he left his Prime Minister position. We asked him why he said it was fraudulent. 'Well,' he said, 'I'm leaving office but I'll be available as a lawyer if you want to hire me.' Unfortunately we haven't hired him yet but there's a good chance we might approach him. I think that's very unfair to a lot of Aboriginal people across Canada. In 1985 when that come to being law, on their level, there was roughly just a little under one hundred thousand Aboriginal people who come under that Bill C-31 label. But they've never been given a fair shake on the equal opportunities like the others have on reserves. The only thing I think we benefit by mostly, is the hunting rights and also the education help that was badly needed in our young people on the Aboriginal level.

I'd like to mention a few things that also happened while I was President of the Métis Association of Alberta, I was also appointed to a committee that they called the Indigenous People of Canada, and on that committee there was 27 countries represented on Aboriginal issues in the world. I really enjoyed it because a lot of those people in the third world countries were Indians, only a different type—the Nicaraguans, the Peruvians, you name it. Most of them spoke Spanish. And that was interesting because of related experiences that I think improved this country and the world a little bit different. At least they're starting to recognize some of the things—even the land claims are working a little better in Canada. I went to places to meetings like Peru, Panama, Geneva, Frankfurt, Germany, also in England. So when you think of all the people we've dealt with in the past, it's a good people. At least we had exchanged some thinking. It was amazing the way they did things. If we spoke English on our 'mike' the ones that could only understand Spanish, it was answered in Spanish. And if they spoke Spanish to us, it was spoken in English in the earphones we had on. But the former Council of Indigenous People, now is mainly taken over by the UN (United Nations).

I have a little story about that too—this UN— because quite a few of our meetings used to be in Geneva. I remember in school as an Indian kid in Slave Lake, I don't remember exactly what year it was—either in '37 or '38. We used to have a school teacher there of German ancestry, named Miss Bechtol. Oh, it had to be later—it was probably around 1939 because the war was on. Anyway, this Miss Bechtol was very interested in

the current events of the war at that time. And we used to have a little issue about fifteen minutes in the morning. She'd bring us up to date what was going on, who was getting slaughtered, and that time Germany had taken over Poland and other small countries. And that time they used to have the League of Nations that operated out of Geneva—we also learned that in school. And I used to think there is no point in us really learning the facts here because who will ever see Geneva to deal with those. But lo and behold, I did get some of those chances. When I was in Geneva around 1981 or '82, the conference room we used—it was quite a large room. And I got looking around at some pictures but I couldn't see them from where I was sitting. So on our coffee break, I went and looked around, and I started seeing pictures of Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill, Mackenzie King, and a few others all of senior calibre in the world. And I asked this one person, 'How come we got all these pictures of these great leaders in this room?' He said, 'That's where they used to hold the League of Nations.' And when I had said, in the old Slave Lake school that I'd never see it, but it got to be a reality maybe fifty years later. It made me feel good to be a part of it. And I wished I would've had some more involvement. I did at a lot of levels. And one of the other things I feel good about, is attending four conferences in Ottawa dealing with our Aboriginal issues mainly in land, and self-government.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK

Food, Clothing, Shelter, and Transportation

- large game (moose, elk, deer, wood buffalo, bear)
- small game (muskrat, beaver, rabbits, ducks, partridges)
- fishing (types and methods)
- berries, roots, plants (gathering)
- agricultural practices (farming and gardening)
- tanning hide (method and products made)
- winter and summer shelters (log cabins, tipis)
- summer and winter travel (by foot, snowshoes, horseback, wagons, scows, canoes, toboggans)

Language

- Cree as the first language
- the use of English
- knowledge of and use of "high" Cree
- mixed languages (Cree and French)
- use of Cree place names
- changes over time
- communication practices

Health Care

- traditional healing
- use of herbal remedies
- midwifery
- influenza epidemic (1918)
- Euro-Canadian health practitioners
- building of hospitals

Education

- oral traditions (songs, stories)
- use of storytelling (entertainment, education, lessons/morals, values/beliefs)
- types of stories (true stories, origin stories, myths/legends [i.e., *Wisahkecâhk, Wetiko*])
- changes in storytelling over time
- establishment of residential schools and public schools

Economic Conditions

- traditional economy (reciprocal exchange, hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering)
- land use

- market economy (logging, sawmills, commercial fishing, fire-fighting, oil and gas industry)

Spiritual and Religious Beliefs

- traditional practices (individual and/or group participation, ceremonies, spiritual practitioners)
- burial practices/gravesites (artifacts, personal possessions)
- influence of Christianity (individuals, family, community, nation)

Aboriginal Status and Identity

- self-identification (nation, Indian status, Half-breed/Métis status)
- government designated Aboriginal status (effects on individuals, families, communities, nations)
- governance of different status groups
- changes in status over time and its effects
- identity issues

Kinship Systems and Social Structure

- patterns of residences (patrilocal, matrilocal, ambilocal, or neolocal)
- form of the family (nuclear, extended, female-headed households)
- marriage partners (arranged, exogamy/endogamy)
- taboos
- inheritance customs
- age groups, gender roles and socialization practices
- methods of social control
- social classes or equalitarianism
- political organization and leadership
- inter- and intra-tribal conflicts (individuals, families, communities, nations)
- values and philosophies
- community activities (social, cultural, political, economic)

Early Euro-Canadian Influences

- signing of the treaty
- fur trade
- local trading posts
- reserves
- transportation (steamboats, trains, automobiles)
- participation in World Wars (impact on men, families, and community).
- development of the old town and new town
- Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian relationships (changes over time)

APPENDIX B

LIST OF AUDIO-TAPES

(in alphabetical order)

1.	Auger, Francois	(Cree and English interview)	March 1996
2.	Auger, Francois	(English translation)	March 1996
3.	Auger, Francois, and Cardinal, Rose	(Cree and English interview)	March 1996
4.	Auger, John	(Cree interview and English translation)	March 1996
5.	Beaver, Alphonse	(Cree interview and English translation)	March 1996
6.	Beaver, Alphonse	(Cree interview and English translation)	November 1998
7.	Bellam, Mary Louise	(Cree interview)	March 1996
8.	Bellam, Mary Louise	(English translation)	March 1996
9.	Bellam, Mary Louise	(Cree interview and English translation)	November 1998
10.	Bellerose, John	(English interview)	November 1996
11.	Bottle, Melanie	(Cree interview)	March 1996
12.	Bottle, Melanie	(English translation)	March 1996
13.	Bottle, Melanie	(Cree and English interview)	June 1993
14.	Bottle, Melanie	(Cree and English interview cont'd)	June 1993
15.	Gladue, Ned	(Cree interview)	March 1996
16.	Gladue, Ned	(English translation)	March 1996
17.	Gladue, Ned	(English interview)	June 1993
18.	Houle, John and Delphine	(Cree and English interview)	March 1996
19.	Houle, John and Delphine	(English translation)	March 1996
20.	Kreutzer, Bob	(English interview)	March 1996
21.	Norberg, Ben	(English interview)	March 1996
22.	Sinclair, Sam	(English interview)	July 1996
23.	Sinclair, Sam	(English interview)	November 1998
24.	Sinclair, Edna and Sam	(English interview)	November 1998

APPENDIX C: FORMS

CONSENT FORM

NAME: _____

Dear Participant:

I am participating in a Royal Commission's Project on the Traditional Roles of Women in Collective Decision-Making. My field of study is the Metis women in Slave Lake, Alberta. The research will include personal accounts from historical and contemporary perspectives about how decisions were made, the roles of women, economic structures, kinship, etc.

If you agree to participate, the following conditions will be met:

1. The final report will be done after discussing with you about its content.

2. You will be compensated for your participation.

3. You will be informed about its publication.

4. You can withdraw from the project or file a complaint against me with the Royal Commission, if you wish to do so.

I am cooperating with the Royal Commission to have a record of the history of our people. I will keep you informed about the progress of my project and any new developments. I appreciate your participation.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE: _____

PROJECT DIRECTOR: _____

DATE: _____

CONSENT FORM

NAME: _____

Dear Participant:

I am participating in a Royal Commission's Project on the Traditional Roles of Women in Collective Decision-Making. My field of study is the Metis women in Slave Lake, Alberta. The research will include personal accounts from historical and contemporary perspectives about how decisions were made, the roles of women, economic structures, kinship, etc.

If you agree to participate, the following conditions will be met:

1. The final report will be done after discussing with you about its content.
2. You will be compensated for your participation.
3. You will be informed about its publication.
4. You can withdraw from the project or file a complaint against me with the Royal Commission, if you wish to do so.

I am cooperating with the Royal Commission to have a record of the history of our people. I will keep you informed about the progress of my project and any new developments. I appreciate your participation.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE: _____

PROJECT DIRECTOR: _____

DATE: _____

It is to be understood that _____ cannot read in the English language. The consent form was read to her in Cree as it is translated. She has signed both consent forms.

CONSENT FORM

Date: _____

Jeannette Sinclair
11203 Groat Rd.
Edmonton, Alberta
T5M 3K2
Fax: (403) 450-2665

This is to advise that I, _____, provide support for the project, Traditional Roles of Metis Women in Collective Decision-Making that will be conducted by Jeannette Sinclair in Slave Lake, Alberta during the spring and summer months. It is my understanding that she will obtain "informed consent" from the proposed participants of the project and that the research project will meet the Ethical Guidelines for Research for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Signed,

_____
SIGNATURE

_____
NAME OF INDIVIDUAL

_____
TITLE:

_____
NAME OF ORGANIZATION

_____
ADDRESS

_____
TOWN/CITY

_____
POSTAL CODE

WITNESS STATEMENT

This is to indicate that I, _____ advised the participant, _____ of the terms and conditions indicated on the Consent Form, and translated it in the Cree language. She fully understands those terms and conditions and has agreed to take part in the research project. I was present when this discussion took place, on this date, _____, at _____, and am satisfied that the participant has given her "informed consent" to participate in the research project.

Signed,

WITNESS: _____

PARTICIPANT: _____

WITNESS'S NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

WITNESS'S AGE: _____

PAYMENT FORM

This is to acknowledge receipt of honoraria from Jeannette Sinclair for the Royal Commission's Project on the Traditional Roles of Women in Collective Decision Making in Slave Lake, Alberta. The amount received as payment for my participation in the project is $_____.

Signed,

_____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING INFORMANTS

Consideration was given to the following areas as a guideline to include a representative cross-section of the Native community:

1. Gender:
   - at least 75% female; 25% male.
2. Age range:
   - at least 60% over 50 years of age to ensure that the historical component is adequately reflected.
   - 40% from 18 to 50 years of age.
3. Aboriginal status:
   - 75% self-identified Métis, "Half-breeds," and non-Status.
   - 25% who have acquired or regained Indian status since 1985.
4. Marital status:
   - married with or without children
   - single with or without children
   - widowed or divorced
5. Education:
   - with some formal education
   - without formal education
   - former residents of mission schools
   - secondary and postsecondary education
6. Employment:
   - employed
   - unemployed
   - never worked for wages
   - retired
7. Residency:
   - at least 75% of the families should be locals who have a history of residency in the community
   - 25% may be recent community residents.
8. Community participation:
   - involvement in community organizations/committees
   - involvement in political organizations at the local, provincial, or national levels.
   - elders and family leaders or spokespersons

CATEGORIES FOR RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The following categories were used in the development of the research instrument: Personal data; Aboriginal status; language; education; employment; economic conditions; hunting, fishing, and gathering; health care; marriage and settlement patterns; community context; gender roles; adaptation of women; leadership; decision making; political processes; and changing traditions.

Each category addresses the following areas:

PERSONAL DATA: age, number of siblings, children and children raised, marital status, length of time in the community, first language, education, and involvement in community organizations.

ABORIGINAL STATUS: status of self, parents, children, and grandchildren, and change in status.

LANGUAGE: Aboriginal language retention among children and grandchildren, first language of the parents, and the use of English among parents' generation.

EDUCATION: public or residential school, parents' education and literacy, influence of mission schools on the Métis, effects of residential schools on families and children, attitudes toward Native and non-Native people, and completion of secondary and/or postsecondary school.

EMPLOYMENT: women employed outside of the home, including self and mother or grandmother; job types; and change in employment for women today.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS: responsibility for finances within the household; the use of banks; means to support family; and the impact of commercial fishing, logging, and the oil industry on the traditional way of life.

HUNTING, FISHING, AND GATHERING: process of decision making for hunting and fishing expeditions or berry-picking trips.

HEALTH CARE: caring for the sick years ago, midwifery, care of the elderly years ago and today.

MARRIAGE AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS: Christian or traditional ceremonies, desirable qualities of potential marriage partners, arranged marriages, and settlement patterns (i.e., matrilocal, patrilocal, neolocal residence).

COMMUNITY CONTEXT: size and composition of typical family; influential or strong families years ago and today; and the influence of Christianity in the community years ago and today.

GENDER ROLES: roles taught to children by parents years ago and today, activities for boys and for girls, role of elders (male and female), description of a "good" man and a "good" woman years ago and today, treatment of children years ago, favoritism of children, and training children for leadership.

ADAPTATION OF WOMEN: dealing with new conditions in the '60s (i.e., the oil "boom" and legalizing use of alcohol by status Indians), dealing with alcoholism and family violence, contemporary issues, women's concerns related to family issues, and generational differences.

LEADERSHIP: community spokespersons years ago, characteristics of female and male leadership years ago and today, and choosing leaders in the community.

DECISION MAKING: involvement of women in daily life activities, role of mothers in family and community years ago, women's roles today, and the authority of men years ago and today.

POLITICAL PROCESSES: influence of the Métis Association years ago, community meetings and involvement of women, participation of family members in mainstream political elections and in Native organizations, and the interpretation of "self-government" and its potential for change in the community.

CHANGING TRADITIONS: changes of women's roles between generations, value of traditional knowledge, changes in women's ability to influence decisions in the community years ago and today, changes in families today, contemporary family issues, and the importance of women in the community today.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Date:

PERSONAL DATA

- Name
- Age and date of birth
- Birthplace
- Number of siblings: (brothers, sisters)
- Number of children: (boys, girls)
- Number of children raised
- Marital status
- Aboriginal status: (Métis, Treaty, "C-31")
- Number of years in Slave Lake
- First language
- Education: (grade, location)
- Involvement in community organizations

ABORIGINAL STATUS

- What is/was your parents' status?
- Has your Aboriginal status changed over the years? If so, why?
- What is the status of your children/grandchildren?

LANGUAGE

- Do your children speak Cree? What about your grandchildren?
- Did/do your parents speak Cree or English at home?
- Did/do both your parents speak English?

EDUCATION

- Did you go to the mission (residential school)?
- Did your parents go to school or to the mission? Could they read and write?
- Were the Métis affected by residential schools? If so, in what way?
- How was the family affected by the children being sent to the mission?
- How were the children affected by being removed from their families?
- What were the major differences between what children were taught at residential school and what they would have learned at home?
- How did these differences affect the children's ability to readjust to their homes/communities at the end of their residential school experience?
- Were the attitudes toward white women in the community different from the attitudes toward local Native women? If yes, in what way? (i.e., did such attitudes affect young female residential school students?)
- Were attitudes toward white men in the community different from the attitude toward local Native men? How so?
- Were there many Native women or men in the community who completed Grade twelve or who have post-secondary education? What about today?

EMPLOYMENT

- Were you (or your wife, if male) ever employed outside of the home? What kind of jobs?
- Was your mother/grandmother employed outside of the home? What kind of jobs?
- How have things changed for Native women today in the area of employment?

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

- Who handled the money in the household when you were young?
- Did your parents use banks?
- How did your parents support the family?
- What impact did the introduction of commercial fishing, logging and the oil industry have on the traditional way of life in the community?

HUNTING, FISHING, AND GATHERING

- How did people decide to go on a hunt or to go fishing? (i.e., where, when, who)
- What did the women do while the men were away on hunting trips?
- How did people decide to go and pick berries? (where, when, who)
- Did men and women agree upon such things differently?

HEALTH CARE

- In the "old days," what happened with people who became sick in the community? How were they cared for?
- Who delivered the babies in the community? Were there any midwives?
- Who looked after the old people when they could no longer take care of themselves?
- How have things changed today with the care of the elderly?

MARRIAGE AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

- Did you and your spouse get married in a church?
- Did you know of people who had traditional weddings?
- How did you and your spouse make the decision to get married?
- What kinds of qualities did people look for in a marriage partner years ago? Do you think it has changed today?
- Did your parents or grandparents ever talk about arranged marriages?
- When you got married, how was it decided which community to live in?

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

- What was a typical family like in the community? (size and composition)
- Were there some families in the community who were seen as being stronger or having more power or influence than others? Why? (i.e., accomplishments of family members, distinguished family members, family size, historical roots in the community)
- Are there families in the community today, who are seen as being stronger or having more power or influence than others? Why?
- What was the influence of Christianity in the community? How has it changed today?

GENDER ROLES

- What things did parents teach their boys years ago? Does it differ today?
- What kinds of activities were there in the community for boys to do?
- What did parents teach their daughters years ago? Does it differ today?
- What about activities in the community for girls?
- Were there people in the community who were considered elders?
- If so, was the role between female and male elders different? How so?
- How would you describe a "good woman" years ago? What about today?
- How would you describe a "good man" years ago? What about today?
- How were children viewed or treated in the "old days"?
- Were there children in a family who were favoured more than others? If so, which ones and why?
- Were certain children trained for leadership? If so, which ones?

ADAPTATION OF WOMEN

- How did people deal with new conditions in the community such as in the 1960s when it became legal for Indian people to use alcohol, and during the "oil boom"?
- How did women deal with alcoholism in the family, spousal or sexual abuse, and family violence?
- What kind of issues are Native women faced with today in the community?
- Are there some things which are mostly women's concerns? If so, what are they? (i.e., spousal abuse, teenage pregnancies, single-parenting, etc.)
- How are things different for you than they were for your mother or your grandmother's generation?
- Are there some things that you wish were the same today? What kind of things?

LEADERSHIP

- In the "old days," were there leaders or spokespersons in the community? If so, who were they?
- Did Native people lead? If so, were they men or women?
- What were the characteristics of a good male leader? Have they changed today?
- What were the characteristics of a good female leader? Have they changed today?
- Were leaders chosen or how did people decide who would be their leader or spokesperson?
- If a leader was considered unsatisfactory, was he/she replaced? How so?

DECISION MAKING

- How were women involved in decision making related to daily life, including place of residence, food-gathering, child-rearing, religious and/or ceremonial practices?
- What do you remember about your mother's role with decision making in your family/community, when you were a child?
- How do women influence decision making in their families and community today?
- How were decisions made regarding, marriage, divorce, sex education, abortion, etc.?

- How much authority did men have in the family and community years ago? How has it changed today?

POLITICAL PROCESSES

- Do you remember anything about when the Métis Association was formed in Alberta when you were young?
- Was anybody in your family involved or do you remember them discussing it?
- Do you remember any government officials coming into the community for any meetings when you were young? Did anyone from your family attend those meetings?
- Were the Native women ever involved in any meetings in the community?
- Do you vote in local, provincial and federal elections? Does your spouse, daughters and sons vote?
- Are you involved in any Native political organizations at the local, provincial or national level?
- What does the term "self-government" mean to you?
- How do you think "self-government" will change things in your community, particularly for women?

CHANGING TRADITIONS

- When you grew up and moved away from your family's home, what kinds of things did you do differently from the way that your mother did?
- Do you think that traditional knowledge is being undervalued? If so, how can it be changed?
- Do you think that your daughters or younger Native women have as much or more power and ability to make changes in the community as your mother or your grandmother did? Why or why not?
- What kind of changes have happened in the community to make the position of your daughters' generation different than your parents' or grandparents' generation?
- What are some of the issues that families deal with today?
- How do you think families have changed?
- In what ways are women important in the everyday life of your community today?

APPENDIX E: MAPS

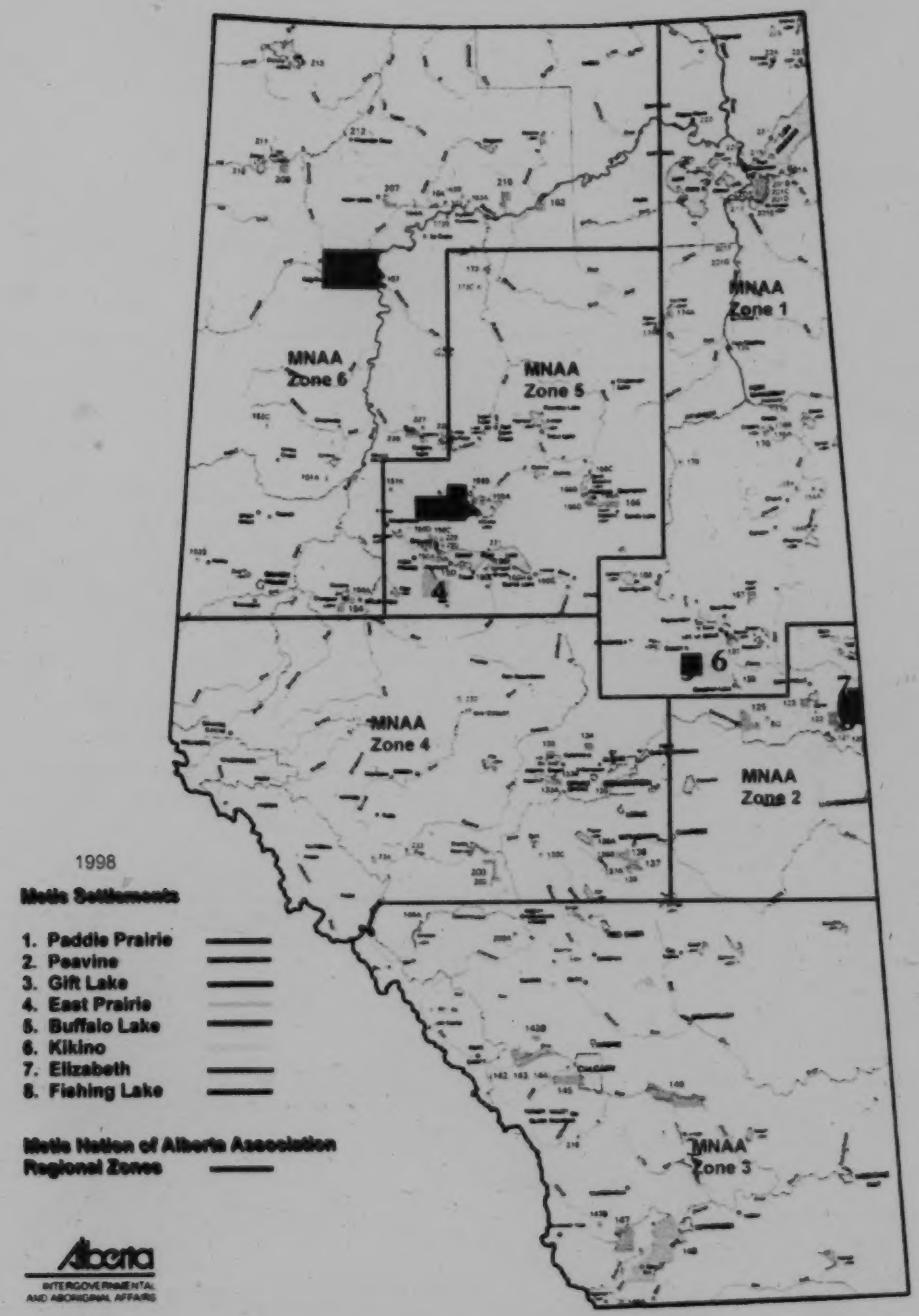
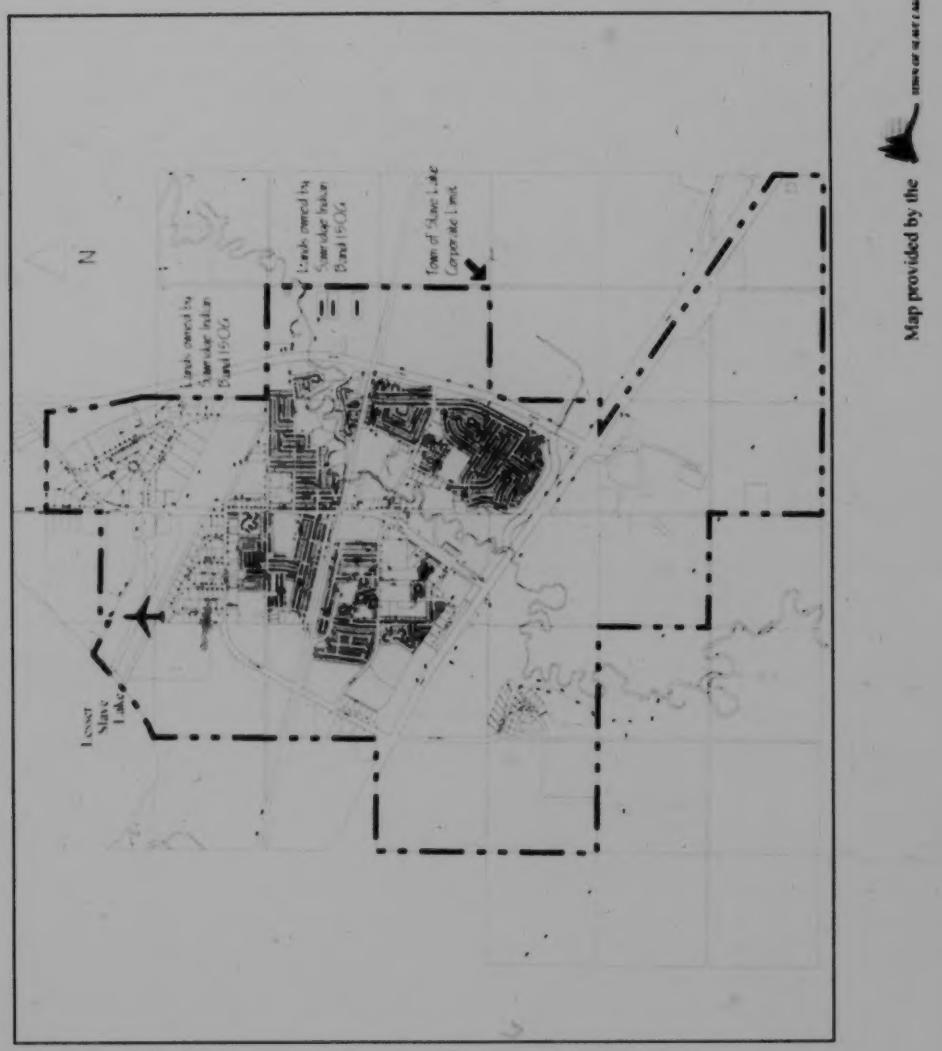


Figure 1. Metis Nation of Alberta Map *(Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, Government of Alberta, public domain)*

Figure 2. Slave Lake Area *(from Lesser Slave Lake Map #830, Alberta Environmental Protection, Edmonton)*

Figure 3. Indian Reserves in Alberta (Resource Data Division, Alberta Environmental Protection, Edmonton)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Lands owned by Sawridge Indian Band 150A
Lands owned by Sawridge Indian Band 150A
Town of Slave Lake Corporate Limit
Lesser Slave Lake
Map provided by the

Figure 4. Town of Slave Lake *(Provided by Planning & Development Officer Ken Venner, Town of Slave Lake, Alberta)*

APPENDIX F: STATISTICS ON THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN SLAVE LAKE

STATISTICS ON THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN SLAVE LAKE

The following characteristics from the 1986 census (Statistics Canada, 1992) provide a summary of statistics on the Aboriginal peoples in Slave Lake residing off Indian reserves and settlements, for selected census subdivisions:

Total population	1,020
Male, total	500
Female, total	525
Marital status:	
Single (never married) total	615
Single (never married) 15 yrs of age and over	200
Married (includes separated)	365
Widowed	10
Divorced	30
Mother tongue:	
Single responses	
English	810
Aboriginal languages	95
Multiple responses	
English and Aboriginal languages	110
Home language:	
Single responses	
English	855
Aboriginal languages	65
Multiple responses	
English and Aboriginal languages	95
Highest level of schooling:	
Less than grade 9	180
Grades 9-13	255
Trades certificate or diploma	25
Other nonuniversity education only	125
University (without degree)	20
(with degree)	—
Sex and major field of study:	
Males with postsecondary qualifications (total)	50
Engineering and applied science technologies and trades	45
Females with postsecondary qualifications (total)	70
Educational, recreational and counselling services	30
Commerce, management and business administration	20

Labor force activity:

Males - 15 years and over	300
In the labor force	225
Employed	205
Unemployed	20
Participation rate	75%
Females - 15 years and over	315
In the labor force	170
Employed	165
Participation rate	54%

Census family status and living arrangements:

Total number of persons	1,015
Number of nonfamily persons	100
Number of family persons	910
Husbands or wives	345
Male lone parents	—
Female lone parents	40
Children	525

Economic family status:

Total number of persons	1,015
Number of persons in low income economic families	370

Total 1985 income by sex and income group:

Males 15 years and over with income	$270
Average income	$19,798
Females 15 years and over with income	$220
Average income	9,571

Employment income by sex and work activity in 1985:

Males	
Worked full year, full time	100
Average employment income	28,574
Females	
Worked full year, full time	50
Average employment income	18,596

(Statistics Canada, 1992)